

## SALVAGE DIVER PROFILE: Goin “Blackjack” Haskins

Meet one of the best salvage divers in the business. At the same time, meet probably the best research historian in treasure salvage. “Blackjack” has been involved in just about every major treasure recovery since the early sixties, not only in the research and location side of the industry, but in the recovery of some fabulous treasure as well. It all began, like it has for all of us, with a fascination for sunken treasure.

Before gold doubloons and pieces-of-eight invaded his daily life, Jack was a technical writer and professional pilot. For a living, he flew corporate executive planes, and on one of his trips to Florida he discovered the world of salvaged treasure. It was a light that was somehow turned on, changing his life from an unknown frog in a very big pond to a bullfrog with his own lily pad. He has been prominent in the field of treasure salvage ever since.

After moving to the Florida Keys in the early 1960s he quickly learned his way around the reefs. It was a time when treasure diving had taken the Keys by storm, and the 1733 Spanish treasure fleet was giving up some great artifacts. Jack began to recover his own horde of coins and artifacts. It was also a time when Mel Fisher was making a big splash near Key West in his search for *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*. He decided that the best way to locate these Spanish galleons was to do the research, and what better place than the archives in Seville.

At first Jack never understood a word of Spanish, but his first major obstacle was getting entrance into the archives. José de la Peña was the director and was strict about allowing only researchers with high recommendations to search the volumes of *legajos*. With the help of a naval attache at the American Embassy, he was able to gain access. Here he met Angeles Flores Rodrigues, the principal staff researcher for American treasure hunters. Her help was instrumental in his returning to Florida with rolls of microfilmed documents, which he later had printed out by the Xerox Corporation.



With several Spanish dictionaries at hand, Blackjack began the laborious interpretation of the florid scrawl of 17th century scribes. After filling notebooks with certain phrases and words peculiar to shipwreck treasure, he began to read the translation directly from the documents. It was an uphill battle, but one that paid great dividends in the years to follow.

On a return to the archives in the early 1970s, he stumbled onto information regarding the location of the treasure galleon *Las Maravillas*, sunk on the Bahama Banks north of Memory Rock. He confided this to Burt Webber, who seemed to have the financial backers to promote an expedition. The expedition was put together, but as they awaited a lease to salvage the site, Bob Marx moved in ahead of them. On the very spot that Jack had indicated to Webber where the *Maravillas* must be, Marx recovered over ten million dollars in treasure.

Jack’s next research project was on the *Atocha* site. He returned to Seville to see what he could find on the sinking of the *Atocha*. He learned enough about the *Atocha* location to return to Florida and place a lease on the area directly to the east of Fisher’s lease. Unknowingly, the lease held the site of the *Santa Margarita*, but in twenty-two feet of water. Jack’s group magged the area in fifty-five feet of water and came up empty. The rest is history.

While in Seville, Blackjack came across a number of references to the *Concepción* wreck site on the Silver Shoals. He convinced Burt Webber to promote an operation in locating and salvaging this treasure wreck. It was during the second expedition to Silver Shoals, with the help of several other researchers, that Jack was able to pinpoint the *Concepción* location. From that site they recovered an estimated \$4.5 million in silver treasure. Several books were written and a movie made on the recovery. One of the major research projects that Jack undertook—resulting in finding and diving on the site of the shipwreck—was locating the Spanish treasure galleon *La Genovesa* which sank on the Pedro Banks in 1730. My book, *Galleon Hunt*, was centered on this research.

Closer to home, Jack's research led to the location and recovery of the 1733 galleon *Angustias* in the early 1970s. The last day of salvage on this site, the day that the cannons were being raised, found Blackjack making a final sweep of the area. In a small sand pocket near the stern of the galleon he recovered the most valuable artifact of the operation, a "royal" four-*escudo* coin dated 1732. The coin recently sold for in excess of \$60,000.

Now the floor of Jack's Islamorada home is littered with books and documents. He sits at a computer that looks constantly hungry for data, and for months it has been fed. And even today, after hundreds of hours punching data into the banks of memory, he still has more than 60 percent of the information yet to be entered. When his job is finished, it promises to be one of the most complete archaeological and historical data banks in the treasure salvage community. Jack Haskins is living proof that research and salvage are fellow travelers on the road to treasure.

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=Bob "Frogfoot" Weller=

**NOTE:** Although Kip Wagner and Dr. Kip Kelso had delved into the Spanish archives earlier, Jack Haskins dug deeper and was able to further uncover the history of the ships of the 1715 Spanish silver fleet loss. These findings were graciously loaned to Bob Weller to be used in his books, especially *Sunken Treasure on Florida Reefs* (1987) and its expanded, Revised Edition of 1993. Jack and his associate divers, Carl Fismer, John Berrier, Duke Long, Jimmy Janda, and D. L. Chaney—known to us as the "Salty Dogs"—successfully worked the "Cabin Wreck", bringing up 2,000 silver coins in one season alone.

Continuing on with Jack's discoveries, we find him back at the Archivo General de Indias in Seville in the 1970s working with freelance researcher Victoria Stapells Johnson in search of more galleons lost in the Americas. It was during this interval that Jack and Victoria found records with the locations of the *Conde de Tolosa* and *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, two galleons laden with mercury and European trade goods which were sunk in Samaná Bay at the east end of Hispaniola in 1724.

Working with treasure diver Tracy Bowden, a man licensed and trusted by the government of the Dominican Republic, Jack soon placed Tracy on these two historically important colonial vessels. Sinking largely intact, the galleons yielded 100s of 1000s of terrific artifacts—enough, in fact, to populate at least two historical/archaeological museums in the capital city of Santo Domingo.

**IN MEMORIAM:** Goin E. "Jack" Haskins, the man whose self-taught expertise in translating musty archival documents written in an ancient scrawl led him to pinpointing most of the famous Spanish shipwrecks in the New World found in modern times, passed away in an assisted living facility in South Florida on 11 September 2012. A patriot to the end, leave it to Jack to leave us on 9/11!

His wishes were to be cremated, with his cremains being divided between the site of the "Capitana" of the 1733 Spanish Treasure Fleet in the Florida Keys and his family plot in New England. A "Keys Memorial Send-Off" was planned for 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, 13 October at "Captain Don's Tiki Hut" (David Foster's facility), MM 82, Bayside, 110 Madeira Road, Islamorada.

Jack's passing leaves a huge hole in the hearts of his friends, acquaintances, and fellow divers that will likely never be mended. —EJR