

# Eureka!

*Loot fit for pirates found in 17th century shipwreck miles off Key West's coast*

By **MANDY BOLEN**

Citizen Staff Writer

Champagne bubbled over and rum and Cokes were stirred with gold bars Wednesday when the crew members of the Mel Fisher Treasure Salvor ship Magruder pulled into the harbor on Stock Island.

They smiled as they showed three gold bars, more than 20 silver coins, several gold chains and ancient medallions to the welcoming crowd that had gathered on the pier.

The treasure hunters, led by Capt. Gary Randolph, eagerly recounted their adventures for those who clambered onto the boat to see the latest artifacts from the 1622 wreck of the Spanish galleon Nuestra Senora de Atocha.

The underwater search for gold and other treasure has continued at the site just miles off Key West ever since Mel Fisher's divers found the mother lode of the Atocha 15 years ago today — a day that has been renamed here as Mel Fisher Day.

The four men aboard the Magruder happily accepted champagne and drinks as they placed their "booty" on a felt-covered table on the deck of the ship and regaled the crowd with treasure tales.

The ship had been at sea for 16 days, with the crew working long



MIKE HENTZ/The Citizen

**HIDDEN PRIZE:** Capt. Gary Randolph shows off a gold chain, part of the treasure brought onto Stock Island Wednesday aboard the Magruder. The treasure hunters believe that an emerald cross or some other type of pendant may be attached in the encrusted portion.

hours with metal detectors under the waves. But their diligence was rewarded July 12, when the first glimmer of gold was seen by Jeff Dickinson during a night dive.

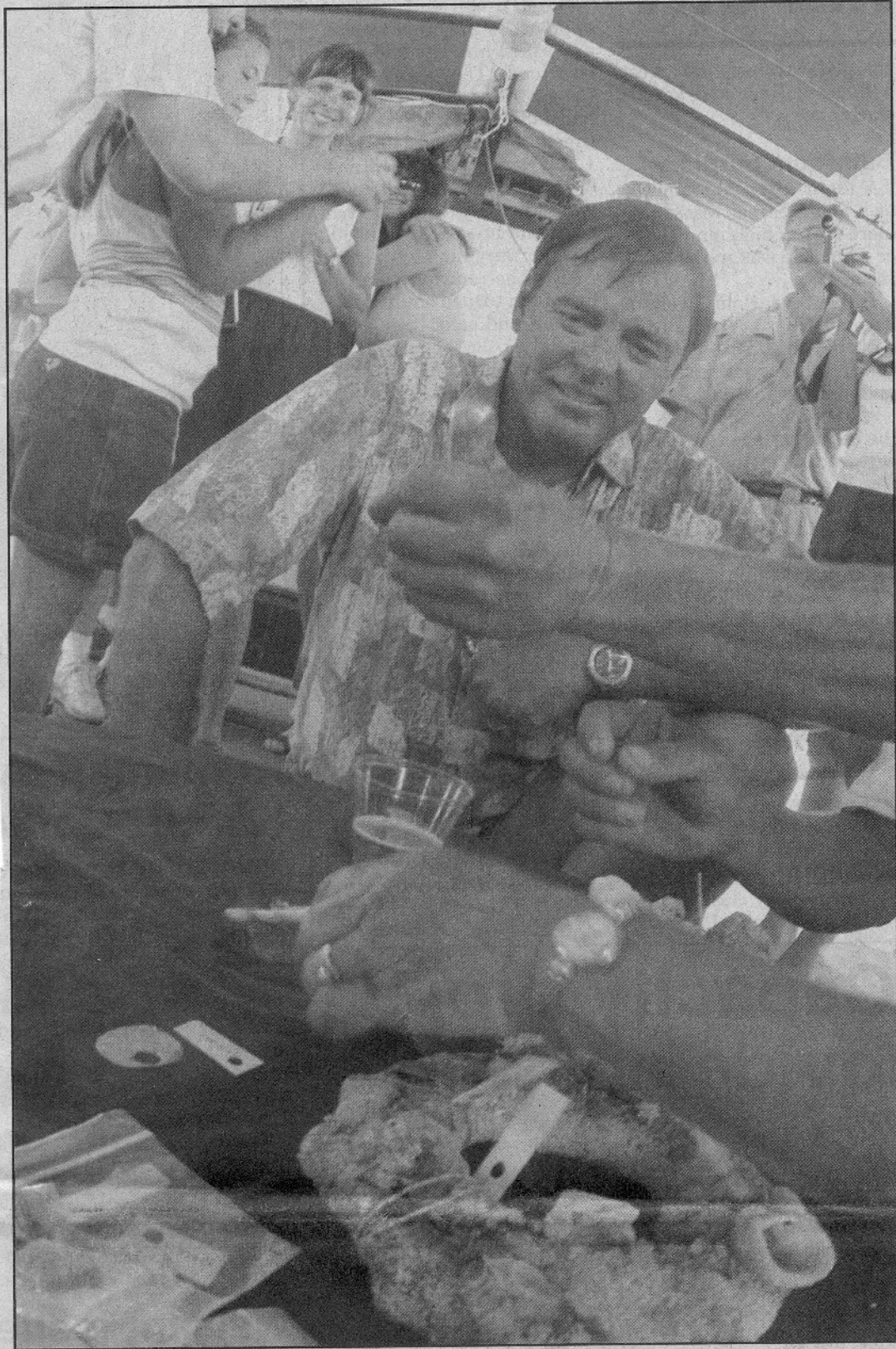
Once Dickinson brought the small gold chain aboard, the crew's hopes were renewed.

The sun beating down on the deck no longer seemed unbearable and the monotony of the search gave way to renewed persistence, which paid off Saturday when diver Scott Synar saw a piece of gold jutting out of the sandy bottom.

Synar plucked the finger bar from the ground, swam over to Randolph and held it up for his dive buddy to see.

"I could hear him through his regulator, saying, 'No way,'" Synar

See **TREASURE**, Page 10A



MIKE HENTZ/The Citizen

**CATCH OF THE DAY:** At a Stock Island shrimp dock Wednesday, treasure hunter Kim Fisher smiles while eager hands touch gold bars from a sunken Spanish galleon. Three gold bars were found along with numerous coins and a few pieces of jewelry.

# TREASURE

From Page 1A

said, his blue eyes as bright as the gold bars on the table behind him.

Kim Fisher, Mel's son, had visited the Magruder operation just a day before Synar found gold and listened to the diver's laments about never finding gold.

"I think I've found more swords than anyone, but never any gold," Synar said. "Kim just smiled and said to be patient."

Synar only had to wait a day before his wish came true.

"It looked like a gold bar sitting on the bottom of the ocean," he told a reporter who had asked what gold looks like underwater. "You can't mistake it - it's beautiful and other treasures

The gold bars are believed to have been part of Spain's church gold because of the absence of tax stamps, which were not used in the days centuries ago when the church was not responsible for paying taxes or declaring income.

The treasure hunters believe that the small chain and a larger one, encrusted with shells and sediment, were part of the treasure kept in the sterncastle of the Atocha - the section that held clergy and noblemen.

It probably broke away from the hull during the storm and scattered a trail of treasure in the sea.

The divers have been looking for the sterncastle section, and believe that another mother lode is waiting where it landed, spilling emerald crosses, gold medals and other treasures

The latest finds are proof that they are close, Fisher said, estimating that the most recent gold bars - worth between \$60,000 and \$80,000 each - were discovered about 10 miles from the site of the 1985 mother lode.

Fisher said the Magruder crew will return to the site within the next few days, along with the treasure boat Dauntless and a survey boat.

If Fisher's estimates of finding the second mother lode within the next week prove correct, then he might also bring two more boats down from treasure operations near Vero Beach, he said.

"Congratulations everyone - today's the day," Fisher yelled to the crowd, echoing his optimistic father's favorite reminder and wearing the same quiet smile that made him Mel Fisher.