

## HOW TO FIND

# USS *Narcissus*



The wreck of USS *Narcissus* is situated approximately 2.75 miles off Egmont Key, outside of Tampa Bay. The site is in 15 feet of water and the wreckage rises several feet off the seafloor. Please use the moorings to avoid damaging the shipwreck with an anchor. The moorings are located at latitude 27° 37.548' N, longitude 82° 47.991' W and at latitude 27° 37.532' N, longitude 82° 47.981' W. Remember to display a “divers down” flag when diving or snorkeling. An underwater guide is available from local dive shops to orient divers on a self-guided tour of the preserve.

As with all other historical and archaeological sites on public uplands and submerged bottomlands, USS *Narcissus* is protected by Florida laws prohibiting unauthorized disturbance, excavation, or removal of artifacts. The site is a military grave,

please treat it with respect. USS *Narcissus* also remains the property of the US Navy, and is protected under the Sunken Military Craft Act (H.R. 4200).

“Take only photos and leave only bubbles.”

## USS *Narcissus* State Underwater Archaeological Preserve

USS *Narcissus* came to rest on a sandy bottom with her stern pointing roughly east. Despite the violent nature of the vessel’s demise in a catastrophic boiler explosion, visitors to the site will find all of the major features of the vessel still largely in their original positions, although the engine and stern assembly have both fallen over to port. The lower hull is completely buried along the centerline forward of the break in the keel near the forward end of the stern knee. Starting from the stern and moving towards the bow, visitors will first encounter the four-bladed iron propeller and the stern assembly. The assembly is comprised of the keel, a keel rider, the inner and outer sternposts, the stern knee, two pieces of deadwood, the shaft, the shaft log, and the stuffing gland. Immediately forward of the stern assembly is a pillow block and shaft cap that would have provided support for the propeller shaft. Forward of the block is the engine and shaft assembly, fallen to port. The single cylinder engine is extremely well preserved, with the valve chest, cylinder cap, cross-head, cross-head guides, eccentrics, bell crank assembly, flywheel, and the forward end of the shaft all still in place. Pipe work for the air pump and the condenser is still present, although sections are missing. The nearly intact engine, standing above the seafloor, is one of the most interesting aspects of the site. Depending upon sand cover, visitors may also see hull structure.



This photograph, labeled “USS *Narcissus*, December 10, 1865,” was mailed home by J. M. Young less than a month before *Narcissus* was lost off Egmont Key (State Archives of Florida. Courtesy of Al and Nina LePage).

For more information, call  
850.245.6444  
or visit  
[museumsinthesea.com](http://museumsinthesea.com)



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# USS *Narcissus*

UNDERWATER  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
PRESERVE  
Egmont Key, Florida



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Division of Historical Resources  
Bureau of Archaeological Research

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FRIENDS OF NARCISSUS

In cooperation with Nicole T. Morris  
and John William Morris III



# USS *Narcissus*

USS *Narcissus* was built in 1863 during the Civil War, in East Albany (now Rensselaer), New York. The United States Navy purchased the tugboat under the name *Mary Cook*, and commissioned her as USS *Narcissus* at the Brooklyn Naval Yard in February 1864. A fourth rate, wooden-hulled screw tug, her hull measured 81 feet 6 inches, with a beam of 18 feet 9 inches, and a depth of hold of 8 feet. When loaded, her draft was 6 feet and she reportedly reached speeds of 12 knots, although her average speed was about 5 knots. She was originally armed with one 20-pounder Parrot rifle and one heavy 12-pounder smooth bore cannon.

In January 1864, *Narcissus* steamed from New York to New Orleans, reporting to Rear Admiral David Farragut for duty in the West Gulf

Blockading Squadron. *Narcissus* participated in operations in Mississippi Sound, New Orleans, Mobile Bay, and Pensacola, taking part in Operation Anaconda, the Union blockade of southern ports.

In August 1864, she served at Fort Morgan during the Union victory at the Battle of Mobile Bay, where Admiral Farragut is reported to have uttered the famous words, "Damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead." The battle featured the use of ironclads on the Union side and mines (then called torpedoes) by the Confederates.

On December 7 of that same year, while on picket duty at Dog River Bar, Mobile Bay, *Narcissus* struck a torpedo while paying out her anchor line during a fierce storm. The mine caused an explosion that left a large hole in the starboard side of the hull amidships. Although the vessel sank in fifteen minutes, no lives were lost and all ammunition and arms were removed. Refloated on December 28, 1864, *Narcissus* was brought to the Pensacola Naval Yard for repairs where she remained through the war.

In October 1865, with the war concluded, Acting Rear Admiral Henry Knox Thatcher no longer needed the many vessels previously required for the blockade. On January 1, 1866, USS *Narcissus* and USS *Althea*, both screw tugs, began their journey along the eastern shores of the Gulf of Mexico on their way to New York to be decommissioned and sold.

According to the deck logs of USS *Althea*, both *Althea* and *Narcissus* encountered a storm off the coast of Tampa on January 4, 1866. The commanders made the decision to anchor outside the port and wait out the storm. USS *Althea* headed northwest against the tide and the wind while *Narcissus* took a seemingly easier route to the west, feeling the brunt of the wind and tide on her starboard beam. It was during this final journey to avoid the shoals that *Narcissus*, traveling at full speed, ran aground on a sandbar. *Althea* also briefly grounded, but was able to power her engine to break free.

At 6:15 pm, the crew of *Althea* noticed Coston signal flares coming from *Narcissus*. USS *Althea* returned the signal at 6:30, but received no response. Thirty minutes later, *Althea* noted more signals from *Narcissus*, but could not understand them. USS *Althea* returned with a final signal, but again received no response from *Narcissus*. Just after 7:00, *Althea's* deck logs note that *Narcissus's* boiler exploded as a result of grounding on a sandbar. The crew of *Althea* stood by in disbelief, and watched USS *Narcissus* break up and sink into the water along with her entire crew.

The next morning *Althea* anchored off Egmont Key and noticed the beaches strewn with wreckage from *Narcissus* along with the unidentified body of one of the firemen and the papers of Acting Ensign Bradbury and Mate L. J. Hall. USS *Althea* stayed in Tampa for two more days to look for survivors, and finding none continued her journey to New York.

