



## **Dive 80 - Salem Express - 16-04-2013**



The Salem Express was a RoRo (Roll-on-Roll-off) car passenger ferry on her return from Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) to Safaga. She was carrying pilgrims who were returning from the holy city of Mecca. Her official manifest showed 690 passengers and crew, but it is rumored that she carried many more people (considering when she was first registered as the Fred Scarmoni in 1964, she was cleared for 1,200 people, 142 cars with 428 passenger cabins - the higher "rumored" numbers are therefore quite likely).



On December 15th 1991, Captain Hasan Moro, one of Egypt most experienced mariners (he was well regarded and also taught at the Egyptian Naval Academy) was returning from Jeddah. It is well known, that

Captain Moro used to take a short cut into Safaga by taking an unauthorized route into Safaga by navigating between reefs just south of Safaga.

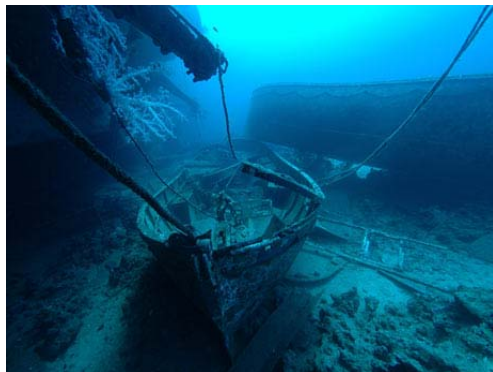
On the fateful day, the weather was deteriorating fast and the comfort on the vessel was severely compromised as she was being rocked back and forth in the gale force winds. Captain Moro took the decision to sail his



"favorite" short-cut and try to shave 2 hours of the journey, but close to midnight with poor visibility the Salem Express "grated" onto the reef, shearing off the hinges off the car deck ferry doors. Water rushed into the car deck, making her list heavily within minutes.



The Salem Express sank within 20 minutes, not even allowing for an orderly evacuation which led to the heavy loss of life, with an official death toll of 470 and a 180 survivors. Official records show 690 crew and passengers, however, it is common practice for



the crew not to register all passengers at the port of embarkation and take more people on board than allowed (extra revenue for both the owner and crew). This must have been the case as approximately 850 bodies were recovered (these reports were later denied by Egyptian authorities).

The Egyptian Navy stopped recovery after 3 days as it became too dangerous to enter the lower decks of the ferry and sealed off the wreck. The actual number passengers will never be known.