



A SEASONED VETERAN

Bob Hedine has learned his trade well

It seemed apropos to meet up with Bob Hedine at the end of the year, when Great Lakes sailors usually have a story or two about the toughest season of the year—winter sailing.

The *Indiana Harbor*, Hedine's ship, was safely nestled between the two ore trestles at Two Harbors. Hedine is working his last watch of the season, literally. In a matter of hours, he will be on his way home.

Hedine extends a hand from a layer of winter gear—coveralls, jacket, hat-liner, hardhat, boots and thick gloves. For this late in the year, there is barely any snow on the deck of the ship, the fo'c'sle is bereft of massive slabs of ice and the inner harbor and Lake Superior, the main body of water behind them, are ice-free.

"Windy, but warm," is how Hedine describes last season. "We sailed a lot of weather courses this fall, but it wasn't cold so we didn't ice up."

Throughout the northern Lakes, record high temperatures were set for December. Hedine's first year on the *Indiana Harbor* in 1989 was one of those years, windy but also "brutally cold" leading to "a lot of sledgehammer work."

One winter day in 1989, still remains with Hedine.

"I was so frozen into my snowmobile suit that I couldn't even bend my legs enough to get over the threshold and into the cabin," he said, laughing about the absurdity of it. "They had to pick me up and carry me in sideways and stand me up in the hallways to let me thaw out!"

The single crazy instance is a poignant insight to a winter with wind and cold, compared to this warm one.

Hedine was born in Detroit, Michigan the next to last child of a family culled from two marriages. His father was a boiler inspector and they soon moved to northern Minnesota, not far from the international border. By the time he was eight, the family was on the move again, to a small railroad and lumber milling hub near Duluth. His

father went to work on the boats as an engineer on the passenger steamer *South American* and later for Republic Steel and Steinbrenner. Thus began the slow indoctrination into the life of a sailing family—the weekly trip to Silver Bay when his father's ship came in: the dusty docks, towering ladders to climb, massive machinery and falling asleep in the back seat of the car on the long rides to and from the boat. There were upsides like time with dad, warm cookies and cakes from the galley, and a smile on mom's face.

In 10 year's time Hedine would see it from a different perspective. By the time he was nearing the end of high school, his father was nearing the end of his patience with having a teenager at home.

"When I was 17, he told me if I wasn't going to come home at night and I wasn't going to go to school, I might as well go to work," Hedine explained. "He got me a Seaman's card for a birthday present and that next spring I went to work."

In mid-June, 1973 Hedine ventured up the north shore, past the trestles at Two Harbors and past the taconite plant at Silver Bay, to Taconite Harbor, a dock resembling a concrete fortress rising from the shore. It was five in the morning when he caught "the boat," the venerable *Frank R. Denton*. Someone showed Hedine to his room, one he would share with two other deckhands. The room was small, rectangular shaped, replete with wire bunks suspended from the bulkheads with a mattress thrown on top; all the comforts of home.

"I was a young kid out for the adventure. I had no idea what I was getting myself into," Hedine said, noting it didn't take him long to learn. "At seven o'clock in the morning they woke me up to go to work."

At the end of the summer, Hedine went back to finish high school, but a few months of sailing had expanded his view of the world.

"You come from Cloquet and the next thing you know, you wake up and you're

in Cleveland or Buffalo," he said. "That's a big change for a kid of 17 years."

After completing high school, Hedine spent two years in the U.S. Air Force before returning to the Lakes. In the winter of 1975, he shipped out of the union hall at Duluth and found himself on the dock at Two Harbors waiting for the ITB *Presque Isle*. Hedine was soon to realize things had changed since he'd last sailed.

"When she came around the corner, I'd never seen anything like it before," he recalled. "The ship was loaded up with ice. You go from working on those little ships like the *Denton*, at maybe 600 feet, and then this big "footer" comes around the corner. She's 100 feet wide and full of ice. Everything is brand new."

It was a sledgehammer winter.

Back then, there were a lot of boats and a lot of jobs. Hedine worked on and off the ships for the next eight years, when he married and began raising a family. Work in the construction industry seemed like a better fit at the time, but Hedine was still working on projects out of town. The higher pay and benefits associated with sailing lured Hedine back to the Lakes. In the fall of 1989, he returned to stay, shipping out as an AB Watchman on the *Indiana Harbor* and was soon learning the trade of a wheelsman under the helm of skipper H. Peter Gronwall.

Now a seasoned veteran, Hedine has learned his trade well.

"The biggest thing to learn is anticipation," Hedine said. "Once you start them turning they don't stop on their own. You have to anticipate when to put wheel against them, how much to use to slow them down and how much to use to speed them up. Each boat is different. They all have their own little characteristics. You really have to learn what they are if you are going to be effective at your job."

Hedine cautioned, you also have to learn to anticipate what the skipper or mate is going to do—the trickiest part of the job.

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