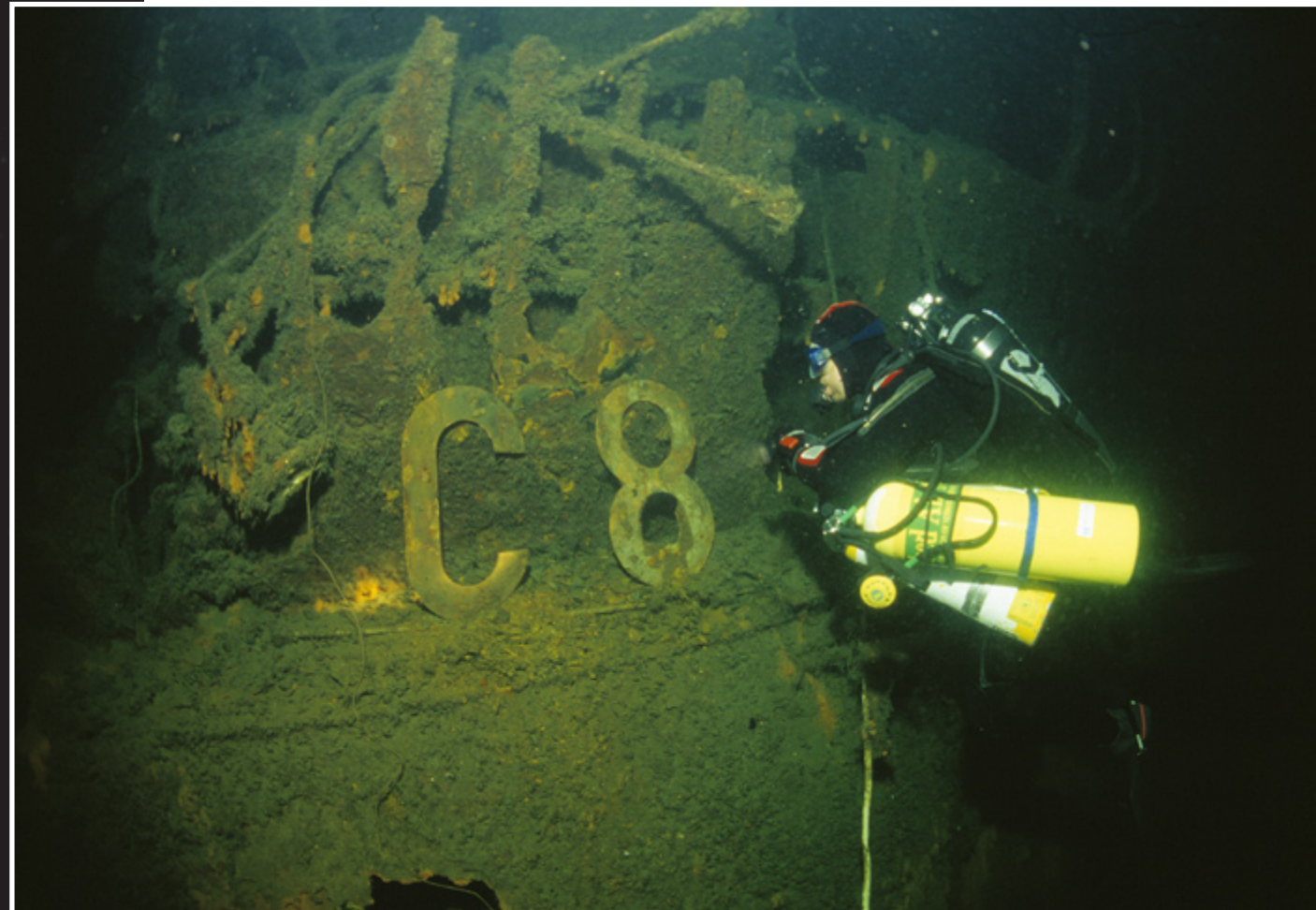


*We all paused a moment—all of us caught by the sudden seriousness of what we were now doing. With this find, we were sure that this was the Soviet submarine S8—missing since October 1941*



S8 lies on 55 m depth. At first, there was doubt about the identity, but divers have confirmed that the brass number on the conning tower says C8 (= S8)

**Below some ragged pieces of wreckage lying on the bottom beside the hull, I see something a little out of place. It's more polished and more regular in its outline. I carefully descend and remove the pieces of metal that hide it. My colleague, Marcus Runesson, is above me providing ample light, making my task much easier. With the debris removed, I see that it is a brass plate shaped like the number eight—matching the letter "C" we earlier found up on the submarine's tower. I hold the eight up to show Marcus, and we share that moment of joy of having found another piece of the puzzle that is the wreck of this Soviet submarine just off the Swedish island of Öland.**

The Soviet submarine S8 was of the Stalinet's type. She left base in the Finnish Bay on 11 October 1941 and believed mined and sunk off Suursaari between 12-14 October 1941. She was discovered in 1991 in a location near Öland (see map page 30) by Marcus Runeson, Mats Karlsson, Stefan Fransson and Sture Hultqvist using a side scan sonar

Together, we lifted the heavy plate and placed it beside the C on the deck of the hull, beside the submarine's fin. Marcus and one of the other divers of our team, Johan Alexandersson, carefully, positioned them as they once were placed by the proud crew. We all paused a moment—all of us caught by the sudden seriousness of what we were now doing. With this find, we were sure that this was the Soviet submarine S8—missing since October 1941. Yet another of the many Soviet submarines lost in the depths of the Baltic is found and identified. More families may now know the fate of their relatives, previously only listed as missing somewhere in the Baltic.

#### **S8 background**

The submarine S8 was built in the town of Gorkiy—today, called by its old name of Nishniy-Novgorod—at the Krasnoje Sormovo-yard between December of 1936 and April of 1937. She belonged to a large class of submarines known as the S-class—meaning Srednaja or "medium". (Western observers initially, erroneously, reported the S to stand for *Stalinets*). The design of the class was of German origin.

Although Germany was prohibited from owning or developing submarines after WWI, development did indeed continue—the yards simply moved their engineer-

**A Soviet Submarine is Missing in Action  
... somewhere in the Baltic**

# The Hunt For S8

Text by Carl Douglas  
Photos courtesy of  
Deep Sea Productions



## Baltic Wrecks

ing departments to Holland. Several countries, in addition to the Soviet Union, purchased designs from the joint firm, among them Sweden, Finland, Spain and Holland. The German engineers further refined the design, eventually resulting in the long-distance Type IX class for the German Navy.

The S8 was commissioned into the Soviet Navy's Baltic Fleet on June 30, 1940. The first year was spent working up the crew and preparing for the war that loomed.

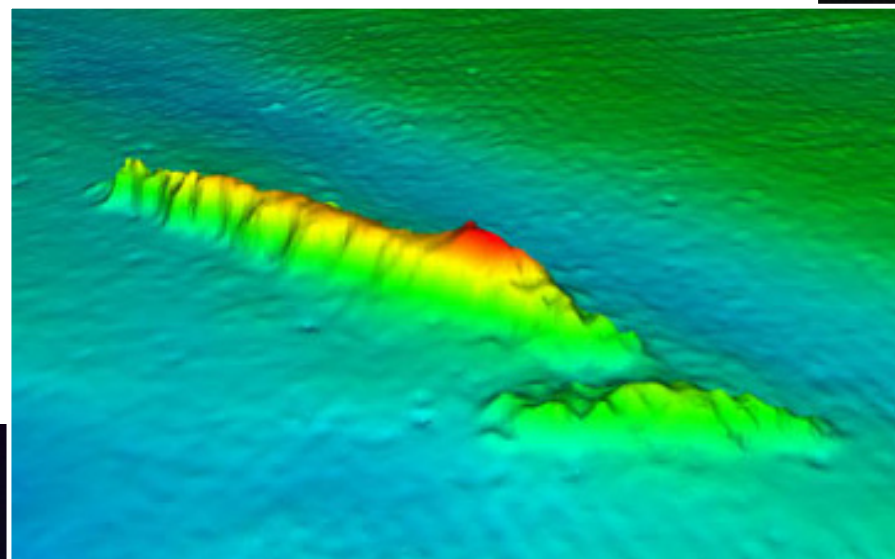
When Nazi-Germany attacked on June 22, 1941, the S8 was based at the large submarine base at Ust-Dvinsk—today's Daugavgriva—just north of Riga, Latvia. Along

with seven other submarines, she belonged to the 1st Division of the 1st Brigade of the Baltic Fleet. Shortly after the outbreak of war, the S8 was sent to sea along with those submarines that were serviceable.

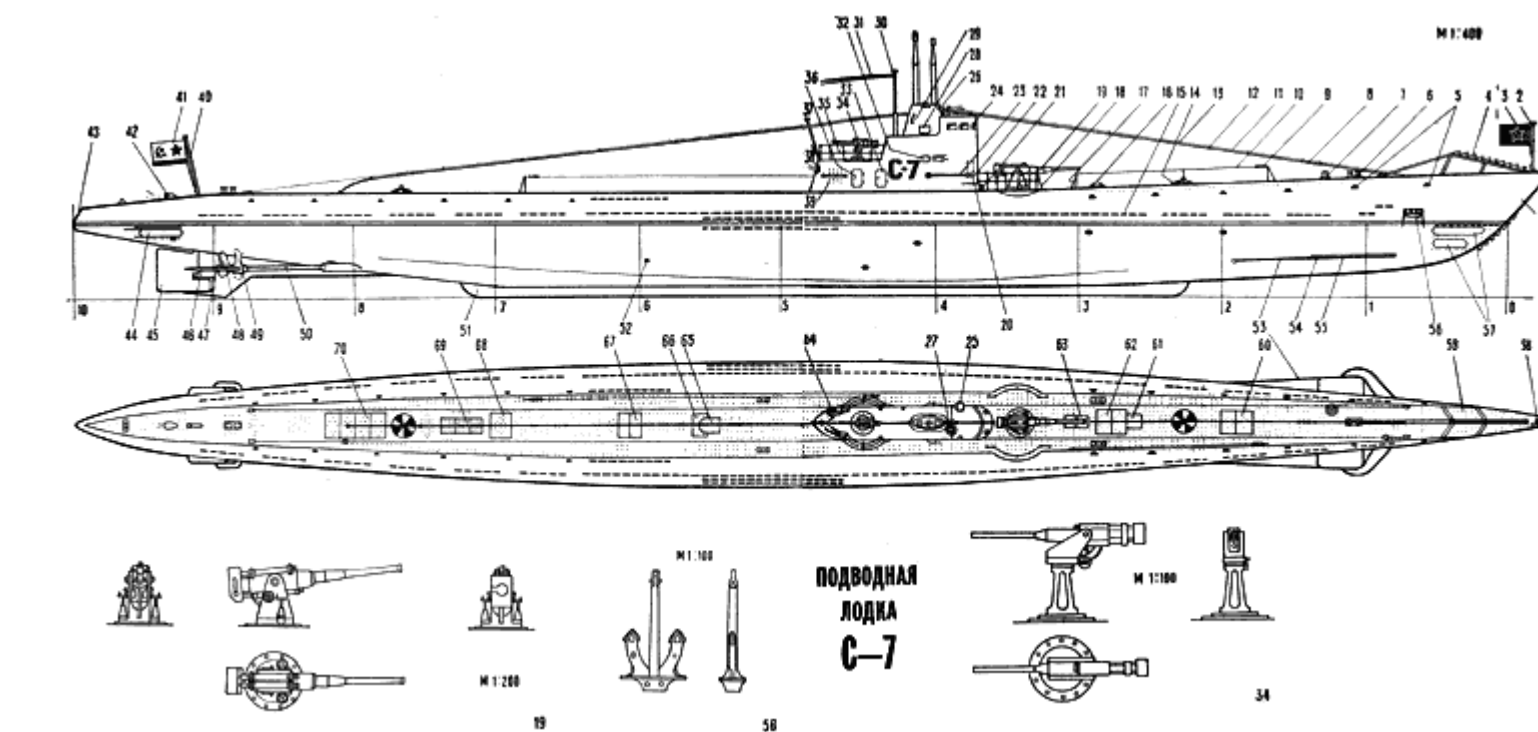
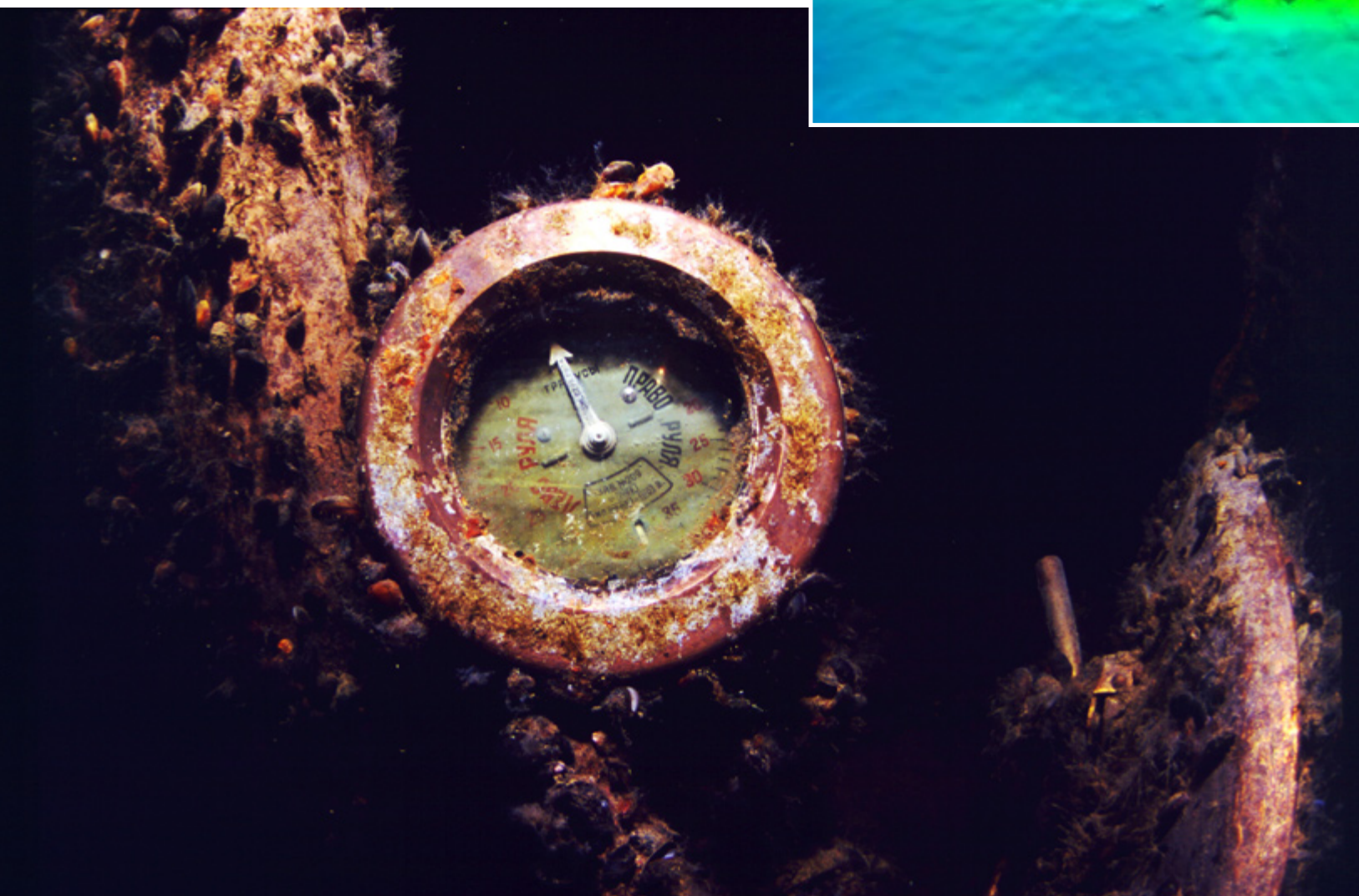
As the Nazis advanced, the Soviet submarines were forced back, first to Tallinn in Estonia and finally to the bases around Leningrad—today's St. Petersburg—at the end of August. It was not until early October 1941 that the S8 could be dispatched for a full combat patrol,

together with three other boats of the smaller SHCH-class.

The force was tasked with interdicting the shipping carrying iron-ore from neutral Sweden to Nazi-Germany in the area between Norrköping and the island of Öland.



The cannon on the foredeck, in front of the tower



The dial on the rudderindicator

Design of the identical sister-vessel S7





## Baltic Wrecks

Just one of the four boats survived its mission and returned to its base.

On October 11, 1941, Captain Ilija Braun of the *S8* radioed what was to be his final report. He stated that he had reached a position just north of the Estonian island of Dagö in the Bay of Finland. After the *S8* became overdue from her patrol, it was assumed that she had been lost just after her last report, either from one of the thousands of mines Finland and Germany had sowed in the Gulf of Finland, or possibly sunk by another submarine (as had her sister ship the *S7* was later to be sunk by the Finnish submarine, *Vesihirsi*). Her crew joined the many millions of Soviet soldiers reported missing in action during WWII.

### The discovery

In June, our group from Kalmar's Scubasport dive store left port to make side scan images of two previously located wrecks—the *Nicomedia* (one of four ships sunk by the Royal Navy submarine *E19* on October 11, 1915 and the *Emmy Haase*).

Along for the ride was also Sture Hultqvist with his homemade "lucky" side scan sonar. This equipment had previously located both the so-called "champagne wreck", *Jönköping*, where some 1,600 bottles of 1906 Heidsieck champagne were salvaged, and the Soviet submarine *S7*.

After completing the imagery and diving the *Emmy Haase*, the vessel headed south toward the other wrecks. The sea was very rough, and only Marcus and the young son of the skipper were not seasick.

Marcus consulted his charts and asked that a small detour be made, so that he could check a position, which some local fishermen had given one of our project leaders,



Mats Karlsson. They had reported retrieving aluminium-parts from their trawls—most likely from the wreck of an aircraft.

Marcus picked up the story: "It was between nine and ten in the evening, and the sun was just setting. Stefan [Fransson], was at the helm, and I manned the side scan sonar. After just 15 minutes of searching around the position we had been given, there was a very clear wreck on the screen. I screamed out loud and ran down to get the others, lying below and being seasick."

They were a bit slow to make their way up to the bridge—Mats thought Marcus was joking with them. But after a while, both Mats and another of the group, Sture, made the effort to come up to see what they had found.

What they saw on the screen was an elongated cigar-shaped object. What could it be? An airplane or some unknown mystery-ship? A torpedo boat or another type of long and narrow vessel? After doing another few turns over the position of the wreck, the group decided to head south to the wreck of the *Nicomedia* to get the side scan images they needed, and then return to dive the mystery-wreck in the morning.



ABOVE: Author and team member Carl Douglas  
FAR LEFT: Lantern on the port side of the turret





Hatch

## The first dive

At six in the morning, Mats was still too seasick to dive, so Marcus and another diver in our group, Stefan Fransson, made the first dive on the new wreck. All they had was air, so the plan was to just make a very brief dive to try to ascertain what was down there.

It was at a depth of 45m where Marcus first saw an outline of a hull on the bottom. Lit up by his torch light, he saw an anchor, some sort of hand rail and a half moon-shaped porthole without glass. Although affected by nitrogen-narcosis, Marcus and Stefan spent another ten minutes on what they agreed was the bow of some sort of ship before ascending.

How did it look?  
We haven't been able to find an image of the S-8, but this is the S-9



UBOAT.NET

## Baltic Wrecks

On the surface, the rest of the gang waited anxiously. Sture was using Photoshop to make the side scan images more clear. When the divers reached the boat, Mats called out the question on everyone's mind, "Was it an airplane?" and Stefan answered with irony, "Do airplanes have anchors?" After listening to the divers' report and analysing Sture's images, the group arrived at the startling conclusion that they had probably found a submarine.

Back in Kalmar, they contacted the maritime historian, Björn Åkerlund, who started searching for clues in the available literature. Nowhere was there any indication of a submarine sunk in the area where the wreck was found. As the research continued, they focused more and more on submarines lost during the First World War. The main reason behind this was that due to the improvements in communications during the interwar years,

more is known about where submarines were lost during the Second World War. In the earlier war, the very primitive radios available meant that very little could be known about how and where many submarines were lost.

The group arrived at a list of possible submarines that could be the one they had located. The most likely candidate was the Russian submarine *Lvitsa* (lioness) lost on or about June 11, 1917, somewhere south of the island of Gotland. Other possible choices were the British Royal Navy submarine *E18*, the sister

boat of *Lvitsa* called *Gepard* or possibly some unknown German boat.

### Mission: Identify and Document

Immediately after coming ashore after finding the wreck, Marcus called the undersigned and wanted me to come document the wreck and, naturally, try to identify it. The group also informed the media of their find, which led to a lot of speculation as to what it was they had found. On the Russian side, there was great scepticism as to the possibility that it could be the *Lvitsa*.

Finally, one month after the initial discovery—after a number of aborted attempts on account of weather—we left port on July 29 to try to ascertain which submarine it could be. On the way out, I went over with the group the various details on the hull for which we would be looking in order to try to at least narrow down the number of possibilities. I went over such things as the shape of the fin, the shape of the conning tower, the placement of the rudders, anchor and hatches, the hull cross section and measurements, the types and placement of any deck-guns, and the number of torpedo



### S8 Data

Crew: 46 men  
Length: 77,75 meter  
Width: 6,4 meter  
Draft: 4,06 meter  
Displacement: 1,090 ton submerged  
Maximum diving depth: 100 meter

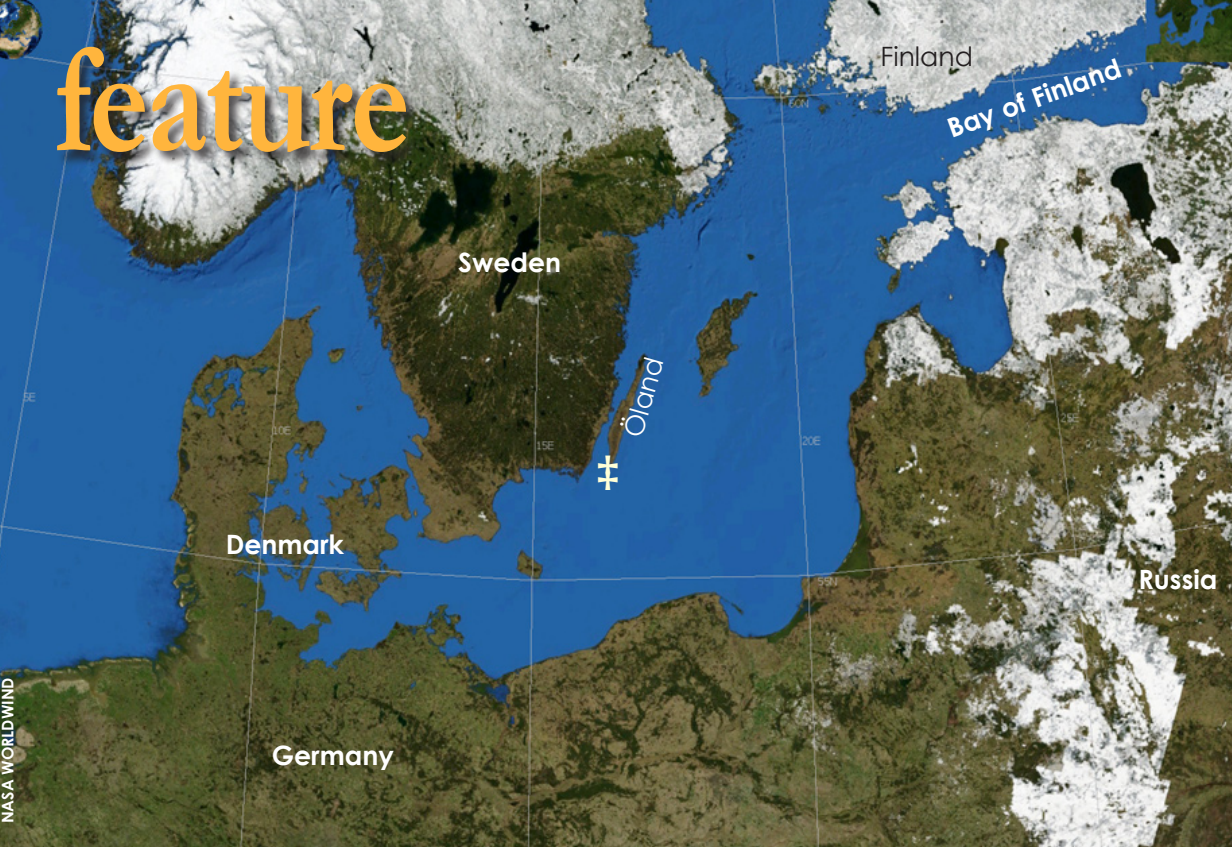
Armament: One 100mm cannon gun with about 200 rounds). One 45mm cannon with about 500 rounds). Six 21-inch (533mm) torpedotubes (4 in the bow and 2 in the stern) with a total of 12 torpedoes.

Propulsion: Two Kolomna diesel-engines (with a total of 4,000 shaft horsepower). Two electric motors (with a total of 1,100 shaft horsepower). Two axles with two three-bladed propellers.

Maximum speed: 19,5 knots surfaced and 9 knots submerged using the electric motors.  
Fuel: about 100 tons

Range:  
9,500 nautical miles at 10 knots.  
3,380 nautical miles at full speed  
9 nautical miles at full speed submerged. 148 nautical miles at 3 knots submerged





LEFT: Map of the Baltic Sea region  
BELOW: Propellor of the wreck

## Baltic Wrecks

### Historical Background to the Submarine War in the Baltic

In the autumn of 1941, the situation in Russia was desperate. The very existence of the country was being threatened. Nazi-Germany unleashed its blitzkrieg against the Soviet Union on June 22, and after only a few months, the situation was nothing short of catastrophic. The extremely rapid advance of the Nazi armies meant that Leningrad (today's St. Petersburg) was already encircled in September 1941, and Moscow itself very nearly lost. During the first five months, the Red Army is said to have lost some five million men killed, wounded, missing or captured — equalling its entire strength when the war started. No international aid was forthcoming, other than a trickle from an equally weak England. Nazi Germany, in the late fall of 1941, appeared invincible.

This was not a situation where the Soviet Union could ill-afford being careful. Unrestricted submarine warfare was ordered against all shipping in the Baltic. Neutral Sweden was desperately trying to stay out of the war, currying favor with both sides, exporting vital goods and materials to both sides. Swedish iron-ore from the far northern mines had flowed south to the hungry German industries of the Ruhr. During WWI as well, the Allies had tried to interdict these supplies.

The Soviet Navy's Baltic fleet lost over 40 submarines during WWII. During the first week after the German surprise attack alone, some 12 were lost. Most of the submarines lost were sunk in the

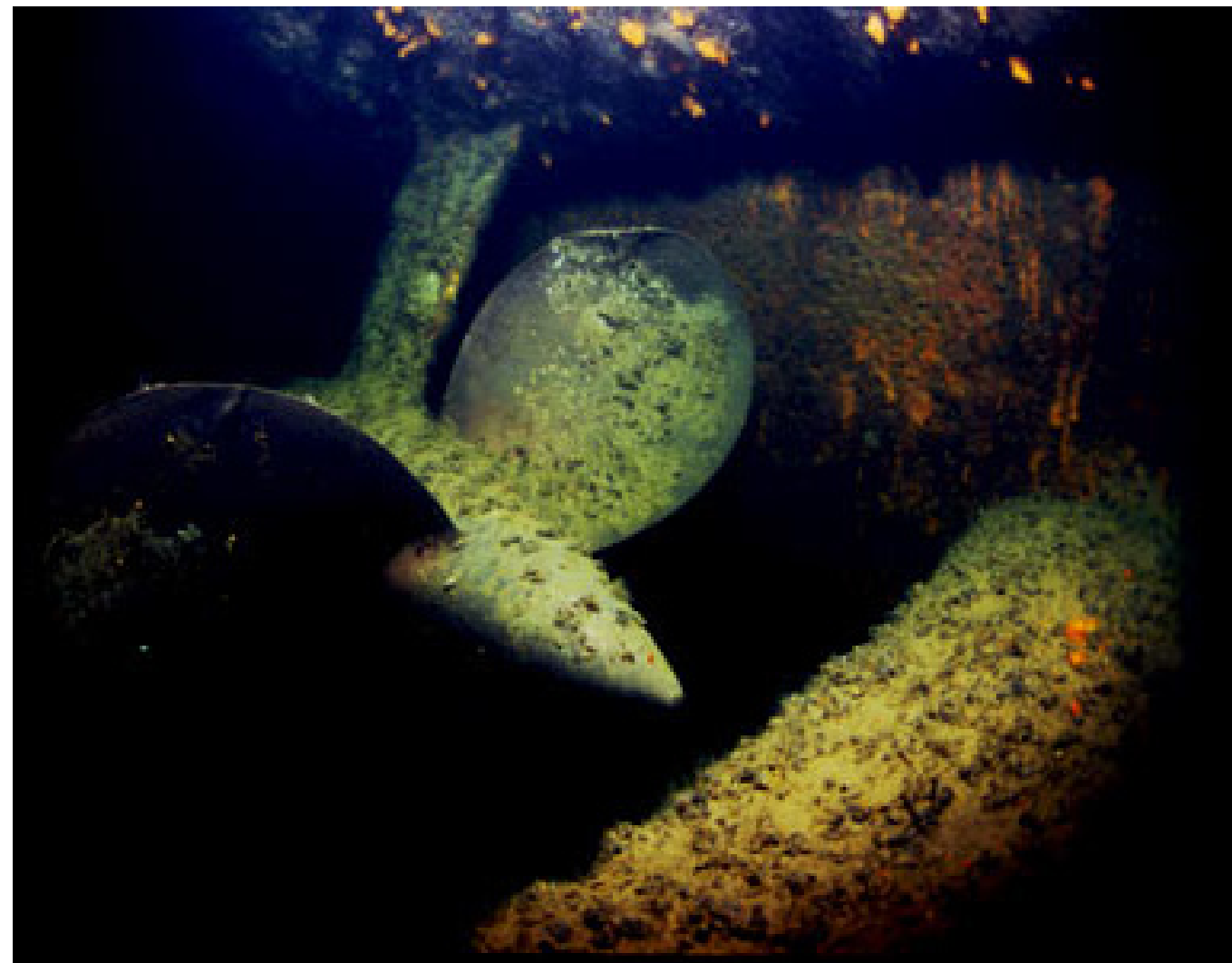
tubes. For this dive, we would keep the number of questions pretty basic.

The first of our team in the water would be Johan Alexandersson and Jonas Dahm, with the task of photographing the wreck and any discernible details from my list. The second group would be the video team, consisting of Marcus, Lena Cloffe, Robert Westerberg and myself.

After giving the lead team a half hour of

quickly adjusted the camera and lights. Visibility was very good—between 10 and 15 meters. The hull appeared to be in good shape, very little marine growth was visible on it.

What I saw around me, however, didn't look right at all. It was much too clean and streamlined in relation to the pictures I'd memorized of the *Lvitsa*, the *E18*, the *Gepard*, and the other possible candidates from WWI.



lead time, we jumped in, formed up, and descended into the darkness. Halfway down, we encountered Johan and Jonas, well into their decompression. They appeared content with their dive and signalled us to go on.

We proceeded down the line. It got darker and darker. Suddenly, I was on the wreck. I landed on the deck just aft of the fin and

When I swam over toward the fin, I noted that the shape of the rear part for the fin and the little platform with its anti-aircraft cannon looked vaguely familiar. I took in the aft lantern, the railing around the platform, the shape of the actual gun, and the housing for the periscopes just forward of the gun. I tried to keep some healthy doubt and not fall

### *The Soviet Navy's Baltic Fleet lost over 40 submarines during WW2.. Most of the submarines lost were sunk in the minefields of the Bay of Finland*

ABOVE: Position of the S-8. In 1941 the Soviet Union ordered unrestricted submarine warfare against all shipping in the Baltic. In an effort to bottle up the Soviet naval units in their bases in their surrounded fortresses at Leningrad the Germans and their Finnish allies planted arrays of minelines and minefields across the bay of Finland with thousand of mines. In light of all this, for a Soviet vessel just to break out into the Baltic was a major achievement in itself.

#### What sunk the S8?

There are currently two main possible causes to the sinking of the *S8*:

1. That she hit a mine. There are several factors indicating this. Our impression is that the damage forward of the fin is more extensive on the lower parts of the hull. On the bow, there is a large section of the outer pressure hull missing, while the upper part of where the hull has been separated show rather less damage. Most metal-pieces point up — as if the explosion occurred below. On one of the sidescan-images there is something that might be a mine anchor a little distance from the wreck. It is known that the Germans

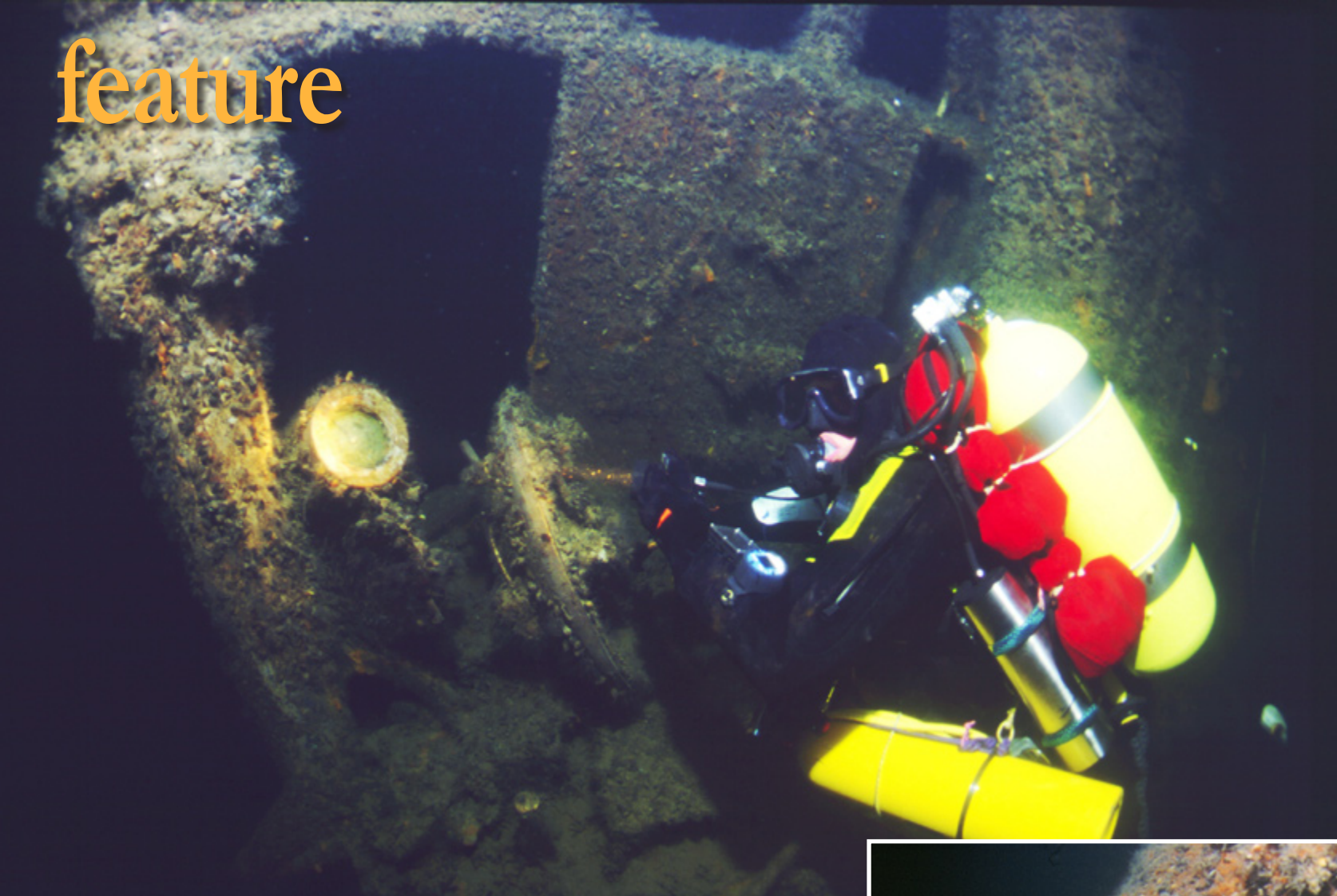
planted a mine line across the Baltic to roughly this area.

2. That she was sunk by some form of cannon or rocket fire. There are a number of holes in the hull on both sides of the hull break that could be the result of shelling or rockets. Additionally, there are what might be shells from the *S8*'s main 100mm deckgun — a sign that she was sunk in combat. What speaks against this theory is that there are no known reports of such an action in this area in either Swedish or German records. Possibly, the aircraft lying somewhere in the area could have been involved. ■



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the wreck in the Baltic Sea

## Baltic Wrecks



a meter aft of the cut, the hull was intact.

I swam on toward Marcus' light. He had found the bow section lying on its side a few meters away to the right. We moved on and inspected the characteristic net cutter in the bow. I videoed the entire bow with stabilizers, anchor and all the details that I could find, in order to ease final identification.

Going aft again, we looked at the port side of the fin. The weather shield had been completely torn away. We looked straight in on the bridge with a rudder-indicator and opened the hatch. We peeked down and saw all the way down to the main deck inside the sub.

In the stern, we inspected the props and rudders. To my surprise, I discovered a torpedo a quarter of the way out of the port aft torpedo tube. It appeared to be stuck just outside the port of the tube. Suddenly, my lights go out, indicating that it is time to go. After 30 minutes on the wreck, we start the ascent to our first decompression stop.

Immediately after the dive, we gathered to look at the video and to discuss what we had discovered during the dive. Marcus explained that what he had seen on his first dive was actually the net cutter and anchor in the bow, thinking the former was a railing of some sort. Jonas

mine fields of the Bay of Finland. In an effort to bottle up the Soviet naval units in their bases in the surrounded fortress of Leningrad, the Germans and their Finnish allies planted many thousands of mines in an array of mine lines and mine fields. In addition, there were underwater nets and cables. These were protected by scores of armed vessels and aircraft patrolling above, ready to hunt down any Soviet submarines that dared venture forth. In light of all this, for a Soviet vessel just to break out into the Baltic was a major achievement in itself.

All told, some 66 Swedish steamers were sunk in the Baltic. Two hundred and three Swedish sailors lost their lives, and some 50 suffered debilitating injuries. On the other side of the equation, 94 Swedish vessels were sunk in Allied service and some 1,379 sailors lost their lives.

The export of iron ore to Nazi-Germany was and is controversial. It is clear that it contributed to the Nazi war machine. It is also clear that the fact that the export was allowed to continue kept Sweden out of the war. Neither can the importation of vital supplies from Germany to Sweden be ignored.

The Swedish government did what it could to maintain our freedom and independence—regardless of the moral questions raised then and now. Was it worth the price? Is it possible to judge in retrospect? My view is that we should study and learn from history—and not always pass judgment based on our knowledge and our morality. ■

immediately for the too obvious, easy answer to our questions.

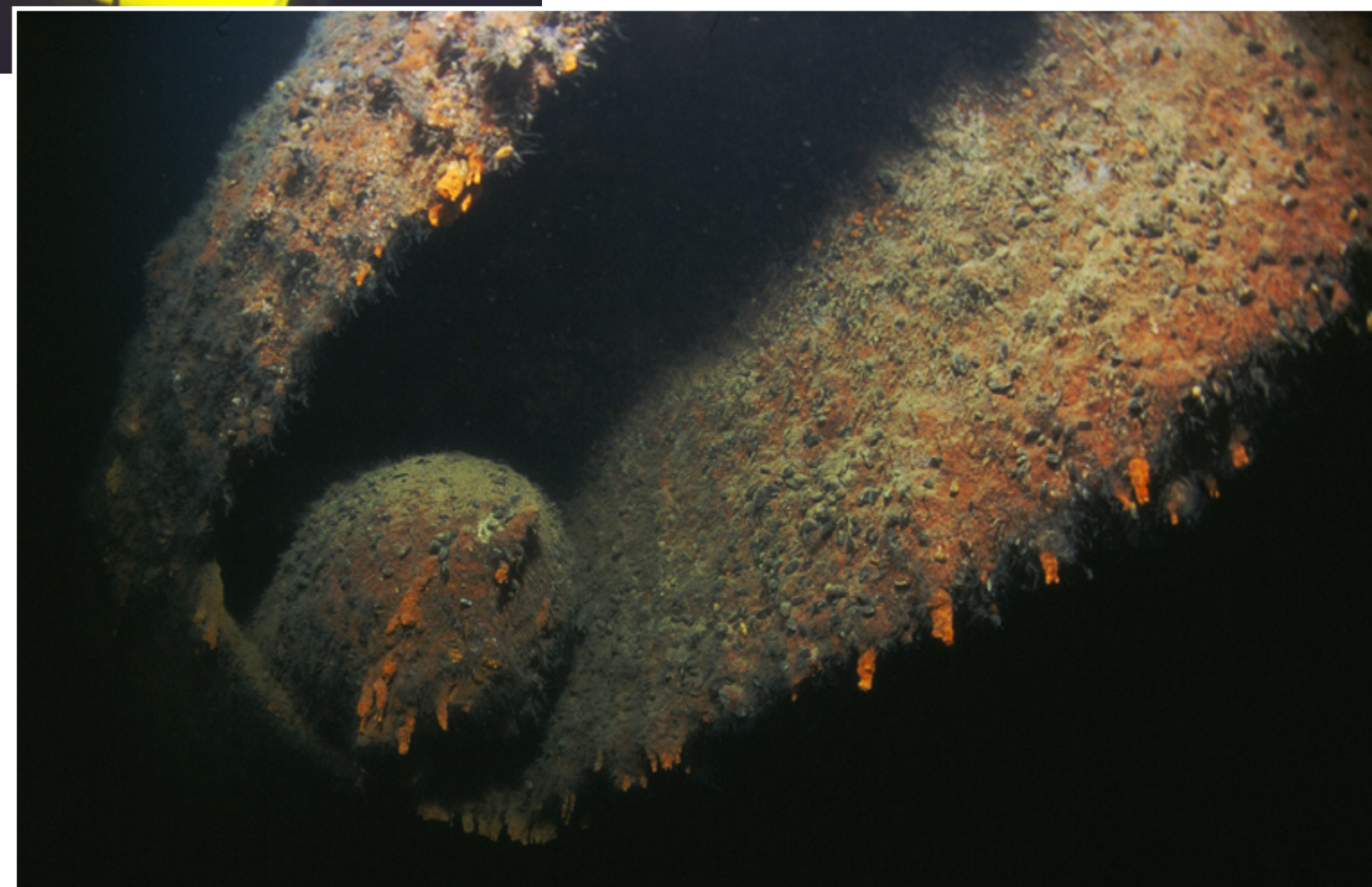
I continued swimming along the deck beside the fin. A little further, I had to acquiesce to my initial gut reaction—this was a sister ship to the S7, the Soviet WWII submarine we had discovered the year before, north of Stockholm. I looked over to my dive buddy Robert, and we both nodded slightly. He had noticed the same things that I had.

My first thought was that this sub was not supposed to be here. In all my research, I had found no indication that any

Soviet submarine had been sunk in this area. It's naturally an absurd thought—it's here, after all.

*The Swedish export of iron-ore to Nazi-Germany was and is controversial. It is clear that it contributed to the Nazi war-machine.*

We made our way forward. Marcus and Lena swam ahead, and Robert helped me with lighting. We noticed that the forward section of the fin showed severe damage, and that the main 100mm deck gun was missing from its place in front. The explanation came a few meters later. It was as if a giant wielded an enormous axe cutting the ship in two. The cut was very clean; just



The aft torpedo tubes



told us about the letter C he had seen on the port side of the fin. None of us saw it, but fortunately my camera did. The letter is very obvious in the video. We take this as confirmation that it is indeed an S-class boat (in Russian the letter C is pronounced as an S).

Following some discussion and checking in some books, we decided that this sub could be any one of several—among them S2, S4, S6, S8 or S10. All of these were lost during the war in such a manner that one cannot be 100 percent sure of the exact location of the sinking. But which one was this sub? How do we figure this out?

Ever since the notorious submarine-intrusions during the 1980s, any news concerning Soviet subs have been front page news in Sweden. Somehow, the media found out that we were out diving

the wreck. Immediately upon our return, journalists started hounding Marcus and the others.

It is impossible to imagine what it is like to have information that the media wants. The group from Kalmar got a quick lesson. There was enormous pressure for them to release our findings. After a few days, the news was released, making the covers of several national newspapers and the national TV newscasts on three networks.

### Another attempt ...

We returned on August 18th to dive the wreck of the sub again. This time, we had enlisted the help of a Russian dive buddy, Max Mikhaylov, to come with us to Öland. Normally, he is an IANTD instructor and, at the time, ran a dive center in the Maldives. But he just happened to be visiting us when we planned to dive the mystery submarine again.

For him, the coming dive would be a deeply personal quest. He served as a diver in the Soviet Red Banner Northern Fleet in the Kola Peninsula and his father was an officer in the Navy. He naturally felt connected to the crew of the sub and was committed to helping us identify her.

## Baltic Wrecks

The purpose of the following dive was clear to all—to attempt to ascertain which submarine we had found and to gather information as to how

*This sub could be any one of several—among them S2, S4, S6, S8 or S10. All of these were lost during the war in such a manner that one cannot be 100 percent sure of the exact location of the sinking. But which one was this sub? How do we figure this out?*

she came to rest where she did. We decided to focus our work around the fin and the area around where she was broken in two. We would spend more time studying these

areas in detail to try to answer our questions.

Again, we were lucky, and arrived on the wreck at the fin—this time, just forward of it. We began the dive on the port side of the fin. Max swam around the fin and took in the scene of the wreck. Marcus and Johan inspected the compass hanging down from the wrecked side of the fin. In front of my camera, Johan began to clean and polish the letter C also hanging there. While filming, I look around and discover the brass number 8. After documenting this find, we again move forward and examine both sides of the break in the hull.

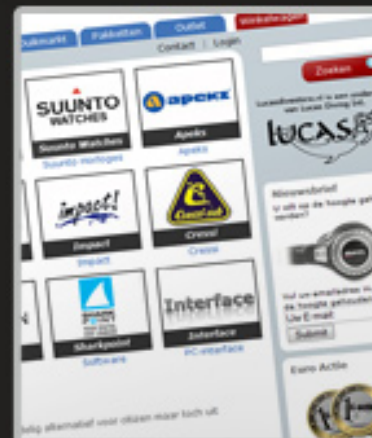
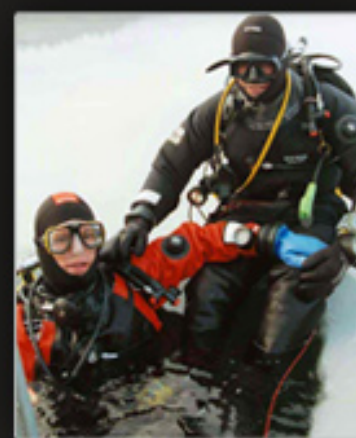
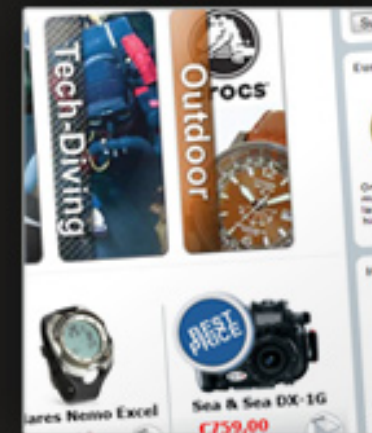
Mostly twisted metal, it is difficult to even imagine how it might have looked 50 years ago. After ten minutes, Max signals that his suit is leaking and that he is leaving us. When Johan and I leave the bow area and swim along the starboard side of the hull, we find another set of brass C and 8.



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The figure '8' of the brass identification plates for the S8

After examining the smaller 45mm gun, we again leave the wreck and begin our journey toward the surface.

A very content group returned to shore. After warming up the thoroughly frozen Max, we all shared our observations of the wreck. We had discovered further pieces of the puzzle that this wreck presented. We were all touched by the intense emotions felt by Max after having dived this wreck. The discussions on the way home mostly dwelt on this subject. We all considered what it really meant to dive on wrecks where people had perished.

Back ashore, Max called Alexander Nortchenko of the Russian Navy Submarine Veterans Association in St. Petersburg. He told him about our dive and

about the brass figures we had found. Nortchenko was very intrigued by this—he explained that it was a common practice to use brass figures during the 1930's, but that it was strictly prohibited from about 1940. He had no information of it occurring after this period. However, he did believe that some submarine-captains did use unique marks, such as the ones we had found on the S8, in order to raise the morale of the crews.

Max and Nortchenko agreed that the sub we had found was the S8, despite that it was found in an area other than where it had been reported sunk in 1941. It couldn't really be any other ship. Nortchenko did not believe any other submarine of the S-class had any reason to be in the area.

### The S8 today

Today, the wreck of the S8 is a protected site. No diving, fishing, anchoring or any activity that might disturb this war grave is permitted by Swedish law. This is in accordance with the wishes of the Russian government, which takes a very active interest in these wrecks.

A memorial service similar to the one held at the site of S7 was held on the deck of a Russian Navy destroyer. In Russia, this issue is very emotional. The incredible losses sustained by the nation during WWII means that every family lost dear ones. Thus, the war is not just history, but something that is still very much kept alive.

With one exception, the wreck is exactly as she was when she was discovered on June 19. The

number 8 once again adorns the fin of the submarine, beside the letter C. No objects have been salvaged. All of us that in various ways have been involved in this project hope that she will remain intact.

Personally, I think Max described it best when he spoke of the S8 and her ill-fated crew: "The submarine was their home. They were proud of it. They worked with it, polished it and improved it. The vessel is still their home. When we dive we visit their home. You ask permission to visit—which I think they give, if they see that you just want to visit them and show your respect."

As to her demise, I believe it is more likely that the sub hit a mine. My hypothesis is that the S8 lost the use of her radio on October 11, but that Captain Braun decided to proceed with his mission despite this. His objective was to gain access to an area south of the island of Öland in order to hit the iron ore transports along the Swedish coast. In this area, there is no protective archipelago, and the transports are forced out into the open ocean. Braun, and the other three commanders in their group, had most likely divided their operational area between Norrköping and Öland into separate zones for each submarine, and that of S8 was the southernmost one. The open turret hatch would indicate that the S8 was on the surface at night, charging her batteries while carefully inching her way south.

During the summer of 1941, the German Navy had placed a number of mine lines between Klaipeda, Latvia, and the south-

### The Project

Project leaders: Stefan Fransson, Mats Karlsson and Marcus Runeson.  
Sidescan operator: Sture Hultqvist  
Research: Björn Åkerlund  
Divers: Marcus Runeson, Stefan Fransson, Lena Cloffe, Robert Westerberg, Johan Alexandersson, Jonas Dahm, Max Rite, Johan Candert and Carl Douglas.  
Crew of KR71: Jimmy Johansson, Peo Johansson and David Mölleberg

Dive depth: 54m at the bottom, 49m at decklevel.  
Dive times: 30 minutes bottom time; between 40 and 50 minutes decompression.  
Bottom gas: Trimix 18/30 (18% O<sub>2</sub>; 30% Helium)  
Decompression gas: 50% Nitrox from 21m and 100% O<sub>2</sub> from 6m.

ern tip of Öland. Their objective was to prevent any Soviet naval units that might escape the battered fortress of Leningrad from reaching the southern Baltic.

The Germans wanted to protect the vital iron ore trade but also the training of their own submarine-crews. These mine lines started just outside the Swedish three-mile limit. Sweden also

placed mines in the area, stopping just inside the German mines. Captain Braun was most likely trying to exploit this gap between the German and Swedish mines.

We are unlikely to ever know for certain what exactly happened, but like other mysteries in the Baltic this does not prevent us from trying to solve the question. ■

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