

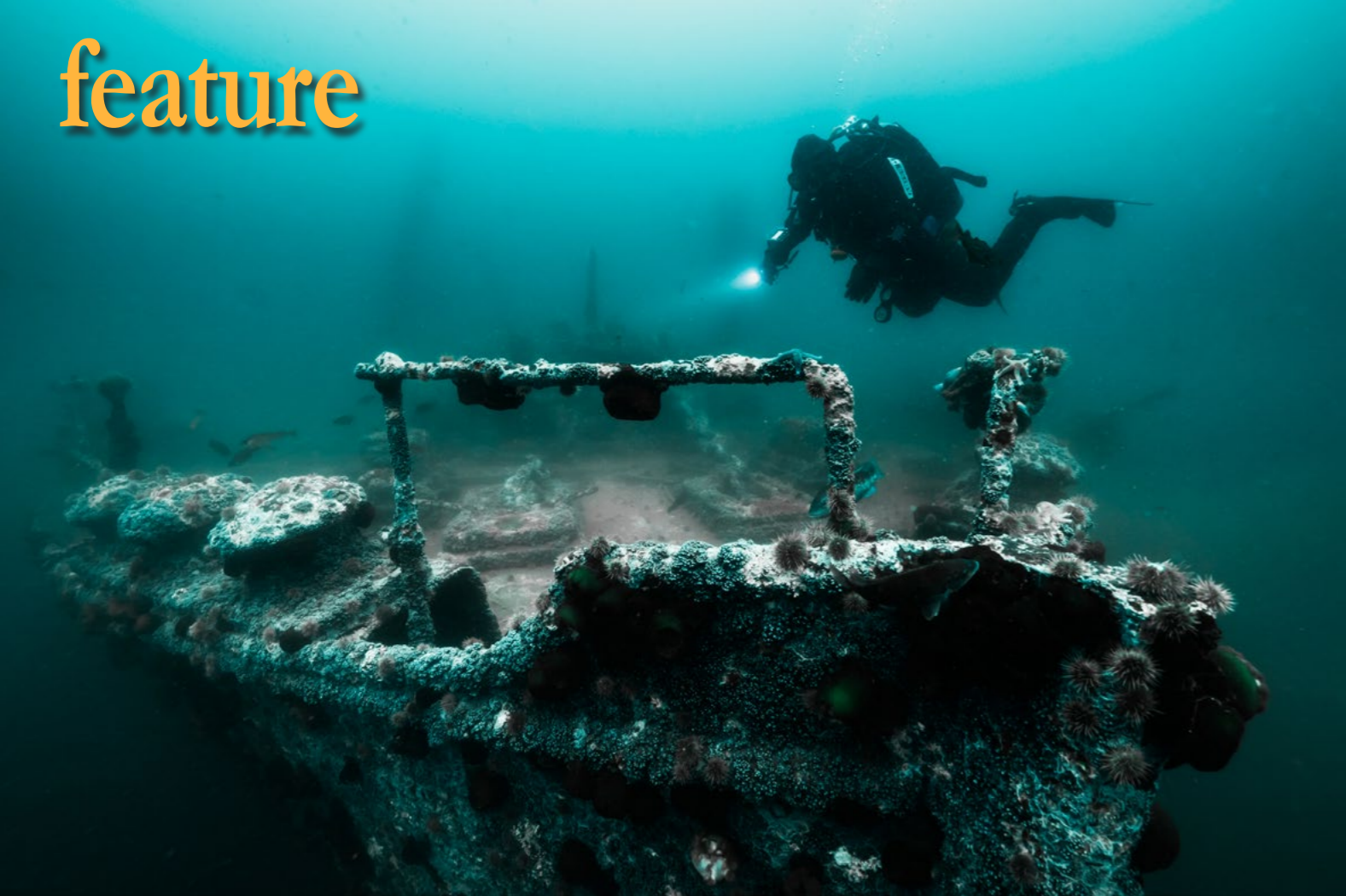
A diver is seen swimming through a large opening in a shipwreck. The scene is dimly lit with a strong blue-green light source from above, creating a dramatic atmosphere. The wreck's structure is visible in the foreground and background, with various pieces of metal and debris scattered around.

My Favorite Wreck Dive

Contributors' Picks from Around the World

Text and photos by Scott Bennett, Larry Cohen, Amanda Cotton, Frankie Grant, Jennifer Idol, Kate Jonker, Matthew Meier, Brandi Mueller, Don Silcock, Olga Torrey and Claudia Weber-Gebert

We asked our contributors what their favorite wreck dive was and they answered with tales and images of remarkable wrecks of all sorts and the artifacts found on them, giving first-hand accounts of their experiences on these underwater time capsules as well as glimpses into the history of each wreck. *X-Ray Mag* contributors reveal the eerie beauty and reverence of underwater wrecks and wreck sites—from the tropical waters of Grenada, Chuuk Lagoon, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, to the subtropical waters of the Florida Keys, Southern California, the Egyptian Red Sea and Queensland, Australia, to the temperate waters off North Carolina, Newfoundland and Croatia.

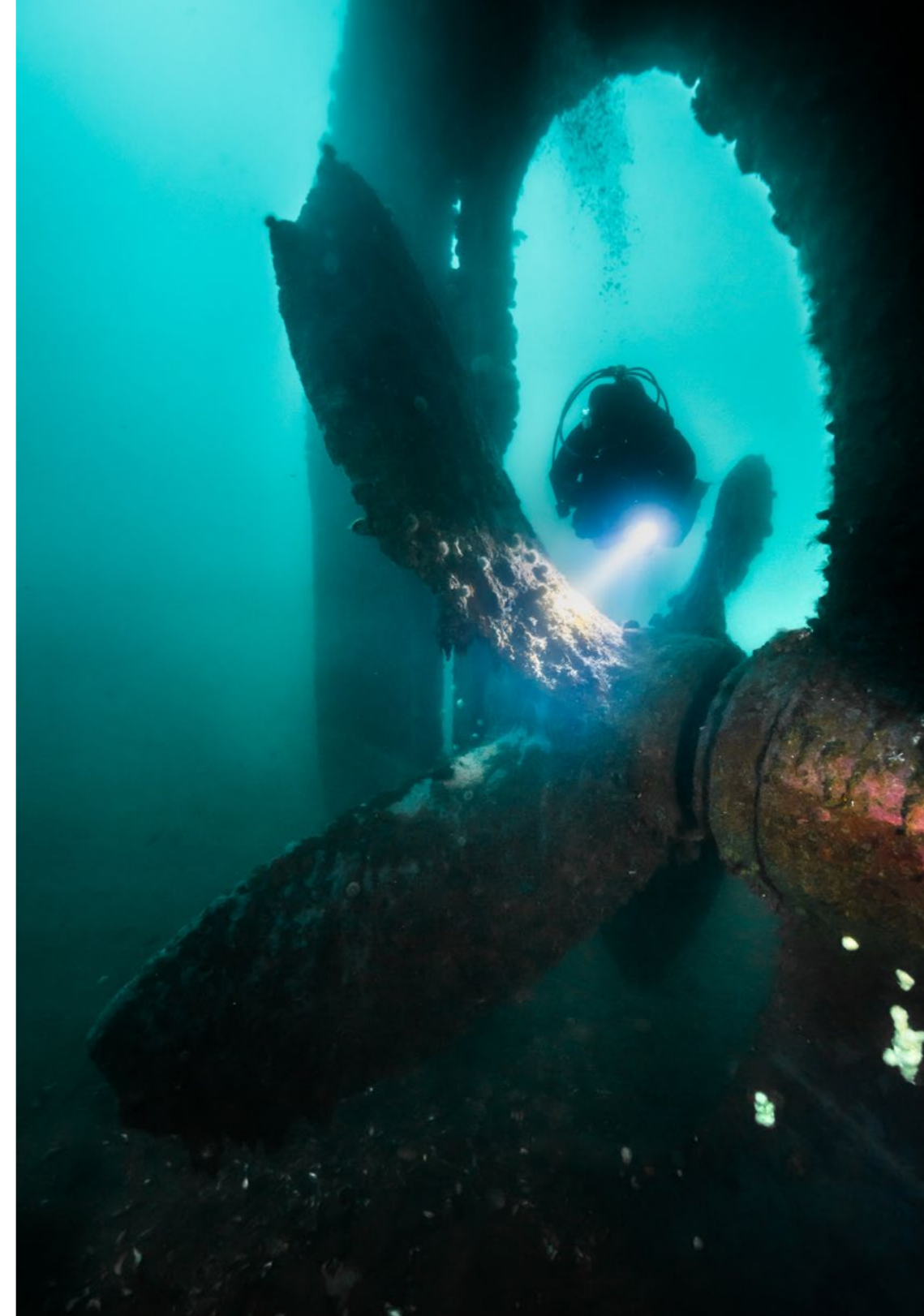


PREVIOUS PAGE: The SS *PLM 27* steel-hulled cargo ship was sunk on 2 November 1942 in Conception Bay at Bell Island, Newfoundland, Canada. This photo shows the damage to the midship of *PLM 27*. The force of the torpedo easily peeled the steel hull open. Exposure: ISO 1250, 14mm, f/8, 1/60s. Camera gear used in all images: Nikon D5 camera, Nikkor 14-24mm lens, Nauticam housing, Inon Z240 strobes

From the bow of SS *PLM 27*, the flattened decks can be seen in the distance. Exposure: ISO 1250, 24mm, f/11, 1/80s (left)

The German U-boat *U-518* fired a torpedo through *PLM 27*'s midship and left a significant hole. Exposure: ISO 1250, 14mm, f/10, 1/80s (below)

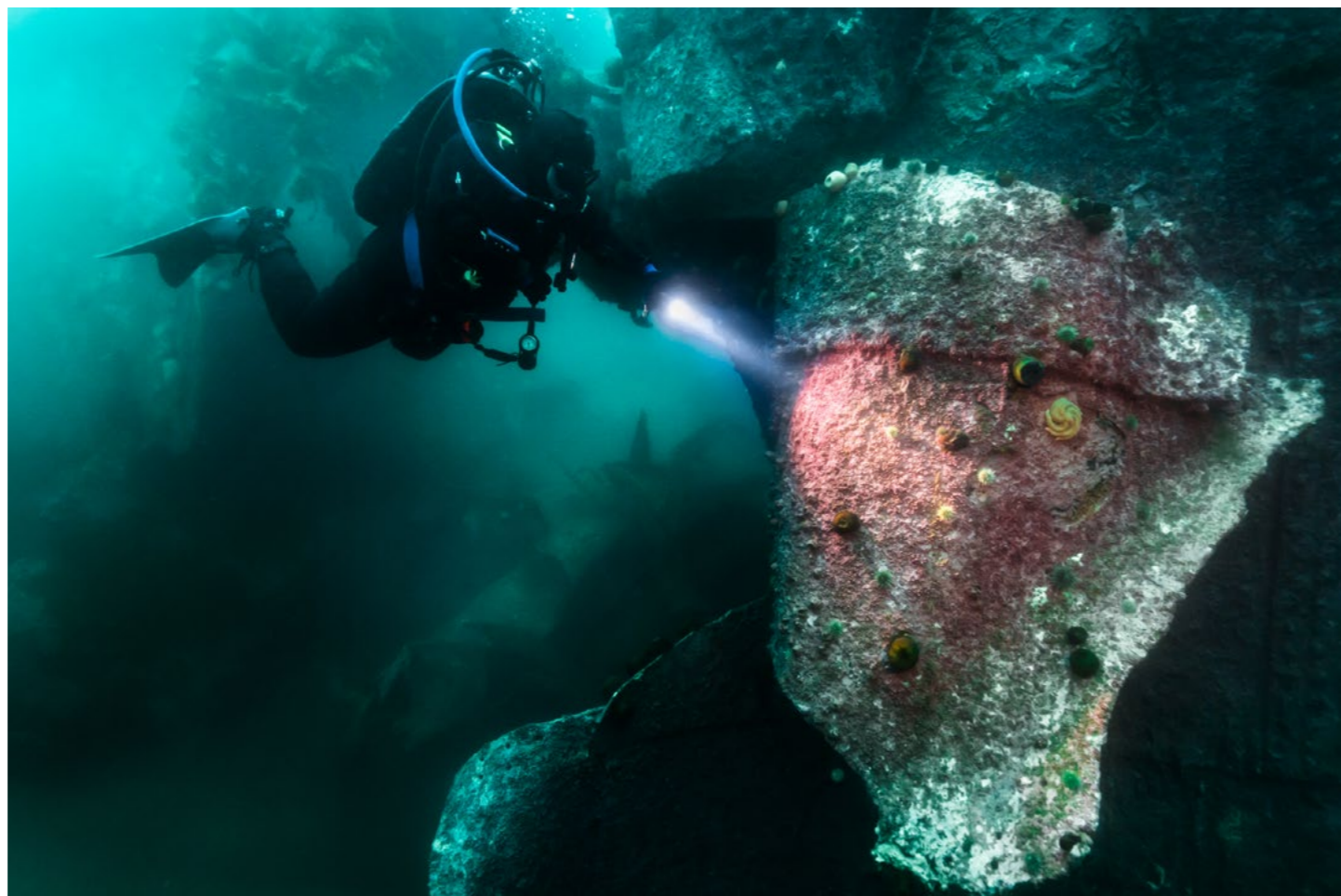
Of the four ships that sank on Bell Island during WWII, *PLM 27*'s propeller is the only one remaining from early salvage operations. Exposure: ISO 1250, 14mm, f/6.3, 1/60s (right)



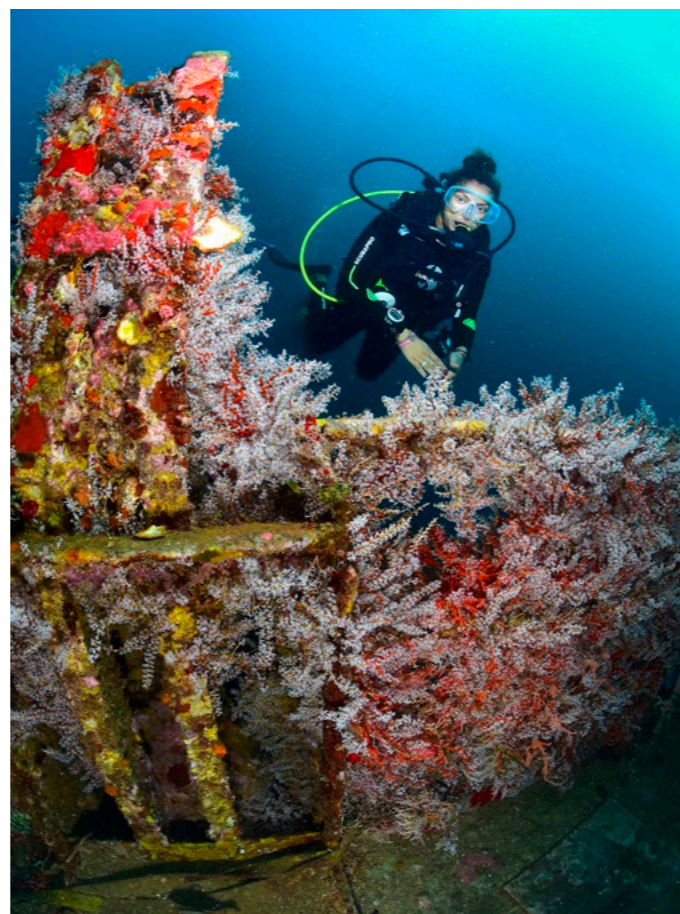
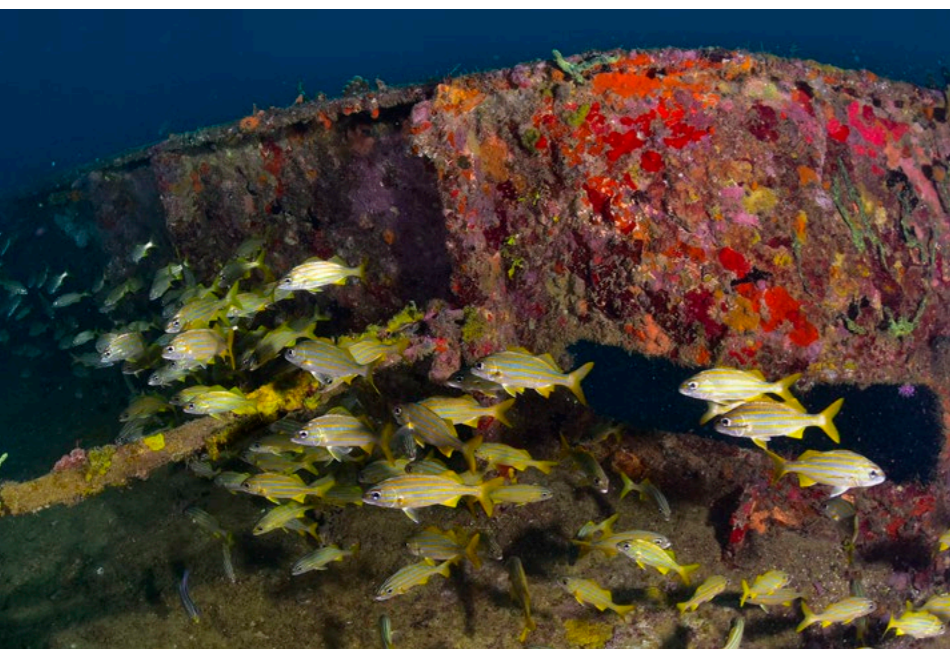
Newfoundland's SS PLM 27

Text and photos by Jennifer Idol

The first dive of any type (and more specifically, wreck diving) is incomparable, so my first Newfoundland wreck dive became my latest favorite wreck dive because of its storied history and the magnificence of the wrecks themselves. I began diving the SS *PLM 27*, the shallowest of the four wrecks sunk by German U-boats in Conception Bay during WWII. This allowed more time to explore the ship from bow to stern. At 400ft (122m) long, the *PLM 27* is an impressive introduction to the intact wrecks found here, though this one is the most damaged of the four ships. These merchant ships, which carried iron ore essential for constructing steel-hulled ships (especially during the war from Bell Island), were sunk in retaliation when Newfoundland stopped selling ore to Germany. I aimed to capture the devastation of this destruction



and the ship's character by focusing on iconic parts of the ship—the bow, propeller, and torpedo hole—and used silhouettes and ambient light, helped by strobes, to emphasize the ship's structure. I love this wreck so much that I lead trips through Ocean Quest Adventures to help others learn how to photograph the numerous wreck sites in the area. Visit: uwDesigner.com



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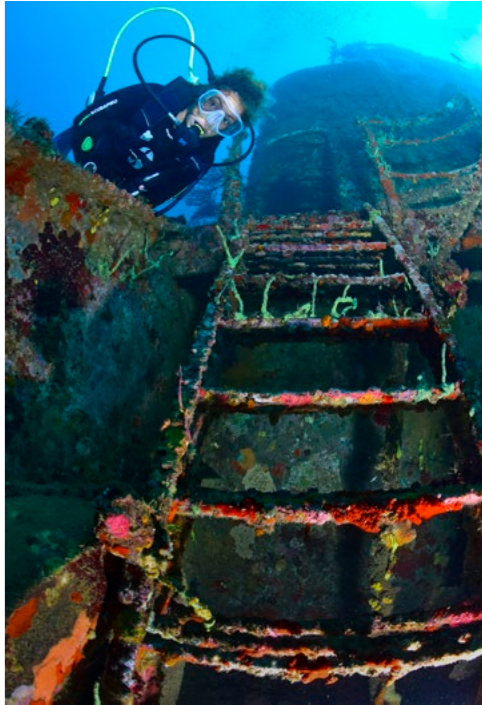


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Grenada's MV *Shake'M*

Text and photos by Scott Bennett

Anchored at the southern end of the Grenadines, Grenada is renowned as the wreck diving capital of the Caribbean. Amongst the island's 30+ dive sites, around 15 separate wrecks can be found off the southern coast, along with three on the rougher Atlantic side. During a weeklong visit with Aquanauts Grenada, a dive at the MV *Shake'M* quickly became a favourite. A 55m freighter, it capsized in May 2001 after its overloaded cargo of cement shifted during a storm. Virtually intact and resting upright at 32m, the decks are situated at around 25m. Massive bags of cement remain strewn across

the open cargo hold, along with machinery and a large crane. Despite its recent sinking, a dense mantle of marine life has already enveloped the vessel, including sponges, fan corals, and most impressive of all, swathes of white telesto soft coral. Fish life is also abundant, including smallmouth grunts, French angelfish, sergeant majors, and the occasional barracuda. Between the fish life and the wreck itself, wide-angle photo opportunities abound. I was also fortunate to have an experienced model as my dive buddy. Grenada-born Tatiana Costantini, a former Aquanauts employee, instinctively posed in all the best spots. Shots of her looking down the ladder and peering from behind the telesto coral made a spectacular dive even better! Visit: xray-mag.com/contributors/ScottBennett

COUNTERCLOCKWISE: On the *Shake'M* wreck, diver and coral (exposure: ISO 400, f/13, 1/100s); smallmouth grunts (exposure: ISO 400, f/9, 1/125s); diver with telesto soft corals (exposure: ISO 400, f/14, 1/100s); the crane (exposure: ISO 400, f/7.1, 1/125s); up the ladder (exposure: ISO 400, f/7.1, 1/125s). Camera gear used for all images: Nikon D810 camera, 10.5mm Nikon lens, Seacam housing, two Ikelite D160 strobes



The *Hoki Maru* was transporting car and truck parts when she was sunk (top left); The ship had bombs and ammunition in her cargo holds (above); The size of the *Hoki Maru*'s propeller is impressive (right); Human remains can still be seen, reminding us of the horror of the war (left). Camera gear for all images: Olympus Evolt E-620 camera, Olympus Zuiko 7-14mm f/4.0 lens, Olympus PT-E06 housing with Olympus dome port, dual Sea&Sea strobes, plus a focus light with a sensor, mounted above the port, which goes out when the strobes fire.

***Hoki Maru*, Chuuk, Micronesia**

Text and photos by Larry Cohen

I was in Chuuk Lagoon nine years ago, and to this day, the *Hoki Maru* remains one of my favorite wreck dives. She sits on an even keel with a slight list to port. Her superstructure is at 24m (80ft), the deck at 36m (120ft), and she rests in 50m (165ft). The holds contain many types of cargo, including bombs, ammunition and vehicles. From the huge propeller that is still attached on the outside to all the cargo inside, there is plenty to explore. Inside the wreck, you can still see human remains. This is a stark reminder of what happened on 17 February 1944.

One of the many reasons I love shipwrecks

is their beauty and how they attract life.

However, we cannot forget the reason why they are underwater. Horrifying events, including war, sent these proud ships to their watery graves.

The *Hoki Maru* was built in 1921 for the Union Steamship Corporation of New Zealand. Her original name was the MV *Hauraki*. She was 136m (450ft) long with a gross tonnage of 7,112 tons. She had the most modern diesel, eight-cylinder four-stroke engine at the time and two huge propellers.

In July 1942, she left Sydney, Australia, with a crew of 50 New Zealanders, when the Japanese captured her. The ship was then taken to

Singapore, after 18 months of being overhauled. The vessel was recommissioned as the *Hoki Maru* in January 1944.

But timing is everything. She arrived at Chuuk Lagoon on 15 February 1944. The US Navy attacked Chuuk Lagoon two days later in Operation Hailstone. The *Hoki Maru* was torpedoed and burned. The ship sank before the next day. Visit: liquidimagesuw.com

SOURCES: TRUKWRECKDIVING.COM, WIKIPEDIA.COM



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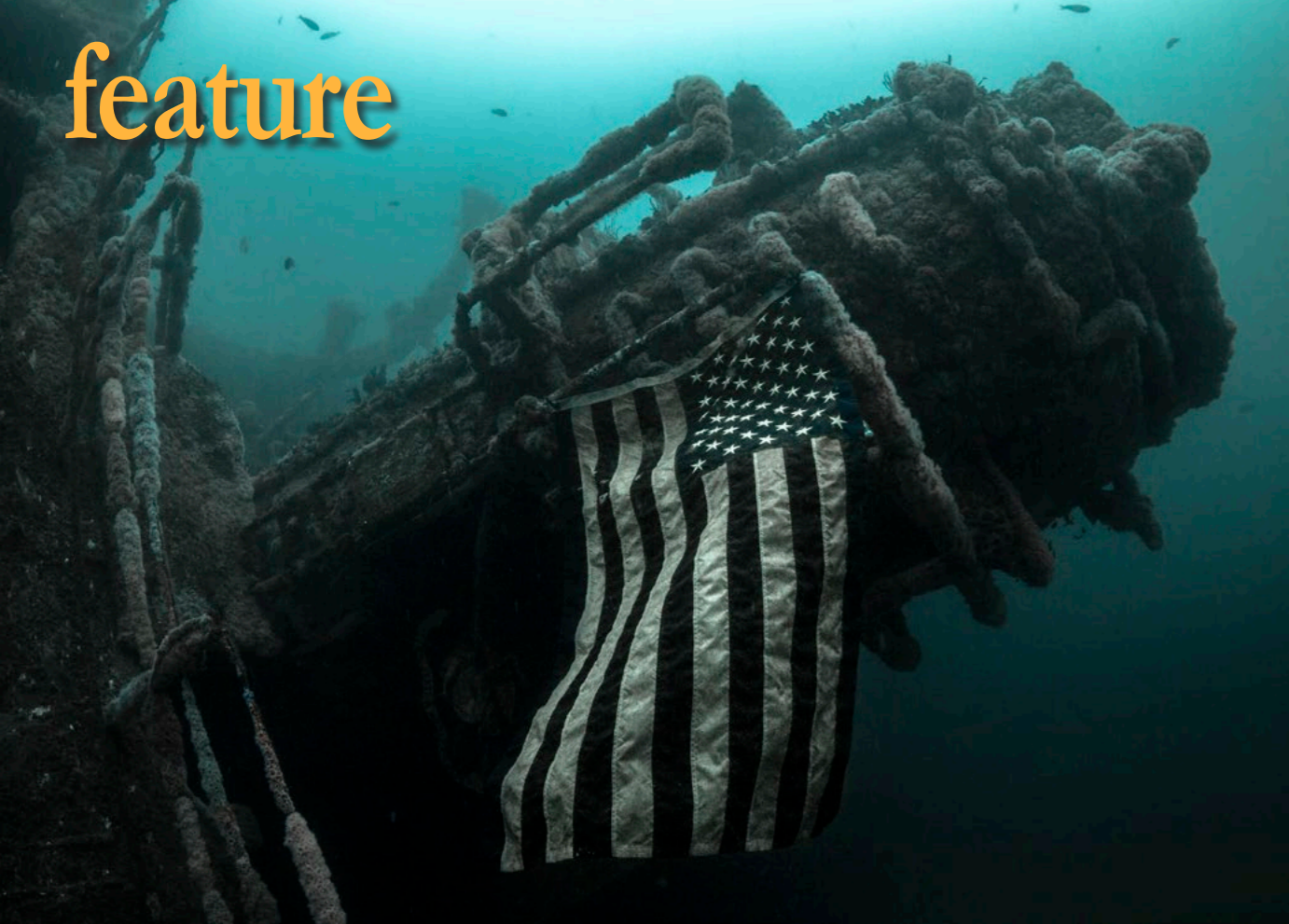
Text and photos by Amanda Cotton

The *Yongala* wreck attracts the weird and wonderful within the ocean realm. A 109m steel passenger and freight steamer ship, which sank in 1911 with 122 aboard, she is one of the most intact historic shipwrecks of great length. Laid to rest in the middle of a vast shipping lane off the coast of Queensland, the *Yongala* is an outpost refuge for a large variety of traveling marine life. The intriguing aspect of the species encoun-

tered on this dive is their size and numbers; the marine life here often seems to be much larger than in other areas of the region and the world. The sheer numbers and variety of marine life found on the *Yongala* are a diver's delight and offer encounters found nowhere else in the world. Diving the *Yongala* wreck is a unique experience and will continue to be far into the future, thanks in part to legislation limits put in place to protect the site and the wreck. Please visit: acottonphoto.com



Located in the middle of a shipping channel, the wreck offers refuge for many species as they travel across remote and barren areas in the region with little relief. Exposure: ISO 400, f/7.1, 1/160s (above); The *Yongala* wreck attracts a wide variety of marine life, including large schools of fish. Exposure: ISO 320, f/7.1, 1/60s (top left); The marine life on the *Yongala* wreck is not only abundant, but seemingly larger in size and healthier than their counterparts found elsewhere. Exposure: ISO 400, f/5.6, 1/125s (left)



HMCS Yukon, Wreck Alley, San Diego, United States, Pacific Ocean (left). Exposure: ISO 400, f/6.3, 1/50s. Camera gear: Canon 7d Mark II, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye, Sea&Sea housing, dual YS-D2 strobes

Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Key West, Florida Keys, FL, USA (below). Exposure: ISO 320, f/16, 1/60s. Camera gear: Canon 7d Mark II, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye, Sea&Sea housing, dual YS-D2 strobes

Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg off Key West and HMCS Yukon off San Diego, USA

Text and photos by Frankie Grant

Two of my most favorite wreck dives are in the United States: the *Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg* wreck off Key West in the Florida Keys; and the *HMCS Yukon* wreck, located in Wreck Alley off San Diego.

The *Vandenberg*, which lies at the southernmost tip of the Florida Keys, is the second largest artificially sunken wreck in the world. This purposefully created reef is not only a playground for avid divers but also home to a variety of species, both large and small. At over 522ft long, you can spend an entire week diving this wreck and never take the same path, allowing divers to return time and again and still have just as much fun as their first dive on the *Vandenberg*.

The *Yukon* was sunk in 2000 when unpredictable winds led to the premature sinking of this vessel, causing it to list over onto its side. This created an

extra level of difficulty navigating the wreck, due to disorientation caused by the wreck's position. Adventurous divers who become accustomed to the average of 15ft visibility, are occasionally surprised by late summer days boasting over 80ft of visibility throughout Wreck Alley. Persistence and patience are key for the West Coast diver. Visit: frankiegrant.com



Wreck Dives

Stern of *Momokawa Maru*, a Japanese merchant ship sunk in Chuuk Lagoon in 1944. Exposure: ISO 320, f/7.1, 1/100s

Momokawa Maru, Chuuk, Micronesia

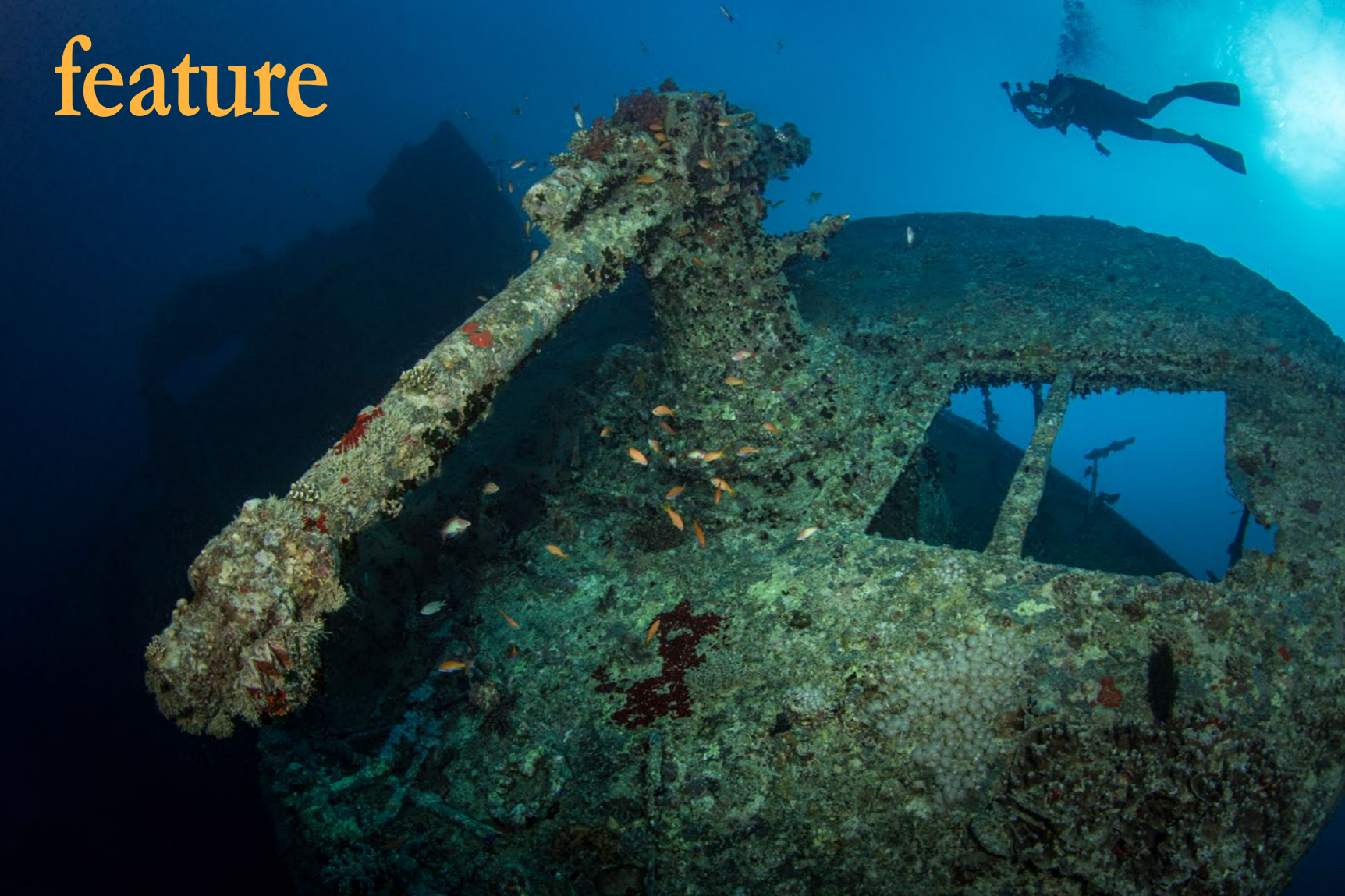
Text and photos by Brandi Mueller

My favorite wreck is the *Momokawa Maru* in Chuuk, Micronesia. I cannot really explain why I love this ship so much, as it is not usually on the top of the list for most who dive the underwater museum of Truk Lagoon where over 50 ships were sunk during WWII. But I always seem to have incredible dives here. The merchant vessel was originally used to transport timber from Siberia to Japan, and its holds were extended to be able to carry the logs. When WWII began, the ship was requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Navy. It was sunk during Operation Hailstone, an Allied attack on the islands of Truk Lagoon on 17 and 18 February 1944.

The 354ft-long ship rests in 140ft of water on its port side in the Fourth Fleet Anchorage. This area usually has good visibility, and divers are met with clear water. Inside cargo holds, one may find truck frames and airplane parts. The wheelhouse is almost intact, with a steering station, telegraph and speaking tubes still present, and the engine room, while small and relatively deep, is an exciting area with gauges and panels. Visit: brandiunderwater.com



Engine room gauge panel found in the wreck. Exposure: ISO 250, f/8, 1/125s. Camera gear used for both images: Nikon D500 camera, Ikelite housing, dual Ikelite strobes

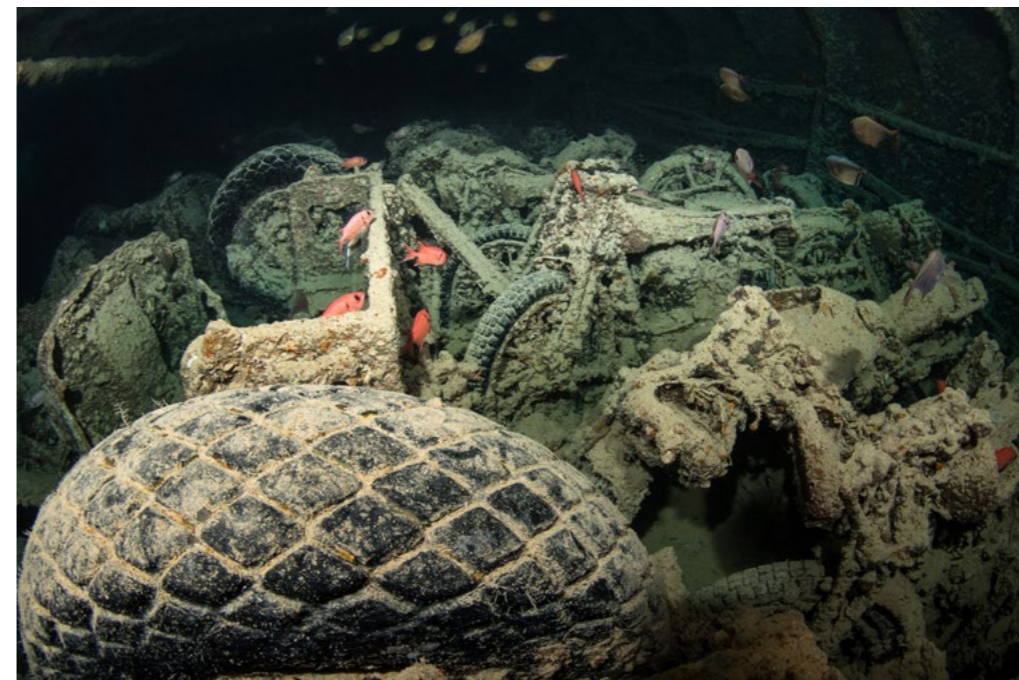


SS *Thistlegorm*, Red Sea, Egypt

Text and photos by Kate Jonker

The wreck of the SS *Thistlegorm* lies in the Straits of Gubal in the northern Red Sea and attracts thousands of divers from across the globe every year. She was an armed British Merchant Navy steamship bombed on 6 October 1941, whilst carrying motorcycles, airplane parts, trucks, locomotives, guns and wartime cargo destined for Allied forces in Egypt. Today, she is an underwater museum and provides a glimpse back into wartime history.

I have been visiting the northern Red Sea on an almost annual basis since 2005 and have dived *Thistlegorm* on countless occasions, always discovering something



BSA M20 motorcycle on *Thistlegorm* (above). Exposure: ISO 160, f/9, 1/125s. Camera: Canon EOS 7D Mark II, Sea&Sea housing, two Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes and an off-camera Inon Z240 strobe behind the front wheel

One of the highlights of the *Thistlegorm* wreck is the anti-aircraft gun on stern of the ship (top left). Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 1/160s; Norton 16H motorcycles on *Thistlegorm* (left). Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 1/160s. Camera gear used for the remaining three images: Canon EOS 7D Mark II camera, Sea&Sea housing, Inon Z240 strobes

new on every dive. Best dived from a liveaboard, she is a capricious dive, open to the elements. I have had dives with screaming currents and others when there has been no current whatsoever, and dives where the visibility has been less than 10m, while on some days, the entire wreck could be seen from the deck of the boat.

Being 128m long and 18m wide, she is so vast that one needs to do at least three dives on her—one to swim the outside, one to explore the holds and another to go back to the bits you think you missed. And even then, you will never see everything, leaving you wanting to return—which you will! Visit: katejonker.com

Coal Tender on the deck of the SS *Thistlegorm*. Exposure: ISO 320, f/9, 1/125s





Diver and a school of yellowtail fusilier fish swimming alongside the bow (above); View inside the fully intact engine room, with a school of cardinalfish (top right); Dually truck axle and other equipment in the cargo hold (right); Camera gear for all images: Nikon D810 DSLR camera, Sigma 15mm fisheye lens, Subal housing, two Sea&Sea YS-250 strobes. Exposure: ISO 400, f/5.6, 1/60s to 1/100s

Kashi Maru, Munda, New Georgia Island, Solomon Islands

Text and photos by Matthew Meier

I am fascinated by WWII history, particularly in the South Pacific; so being able to see this wreck in person was very special. The *Kashi Maru* was a Japanese supply ship that was sunk by a US B25 bomber while offloading equipment in Mbaeroko Bay during WWII. Palm trees were suspended over the bay to hide the supply depot from the air. However, local Coastwatchers alerted Allied Forces to its presence, and when the bomber arrived, smoke from one of the ships engines was visible through the palm trees, giving away its

location, and the ship was destroyed.

She is now resting nearly upright in roughly 30ft (10m) of water, with the bow deeper than the stern. The metal hull was peeled open from the force of the blast, and the cargo hold still contains truck axles, tires, spools of wire and other gear inside. The engine room was undamaged by the explosion, and the tight space can be carefully explored for those that are properly trained. The bay is at the mouth of a river, and the green brackish water was full of sediment due to recent rains, dictating the conversion of my images to black and white. Thanks go to Dive Munda (divemunda.com) and Solomon Islands Dive Expeditions (solomonsdiving.com) for hosting this adventure. Visit: MatthewMeierPhoto.com

Diver at the bow, showing one of the remaining smoke stacks

SeaLife



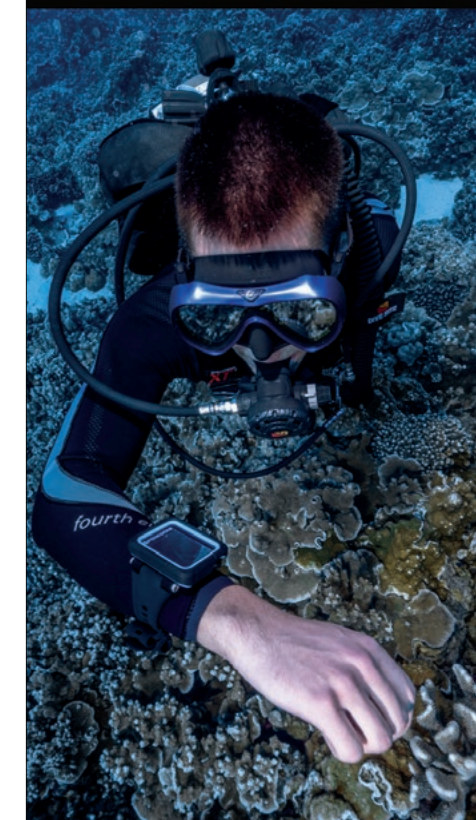
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Diver at tail of Black Jack (left). Exposure: ISO 400, f/11, 1/100s; Overview of Black Jack (far left). Exposure: ISO 400, f/8, 1/60s. Camera gear used in all three underwater images: Nikon D300 camera, 10.5mm lens, Subal housing, dual Ikelite DS160 strobes



B17F Black Jack, Papua New Guinea

Text and photos by Don Silcock

Wrecks are almost always pretty special, particularly so if the backstory to whatever happened is known—which is probably why the wreck of the B17F Black Jack in Papua New Guinea would have to be my favorite!

The Boeing B17 Flying Fortress was a four-engined heavy bomber that saw extensive service with the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) in WWII. It is the third-most produced bomber of all time and earned a strong reputation as a tough and reliable workhorse.

There are a few things that are really special about the Black Jack, starting with the wreck itself, which is in nearly 50m of water, just off the fringing reef near the remote village of Boga Boga at Cape Vogel on the northern coast of the main island of New Guinea. The wreck is remarkably intact, so much so, it looks a bit like a movie set.

Then there is its incredible discovery in December 1986 by Rod Pierce, a long-term PNG resident and dedicated wreck diver. Pierce literally stumbled on the Black Jack while looking for the wreck of an Australian WWII A9 Beaufort Bomber!

Finally, there is the backstory to the Black Jack, which is not only known but a documentary was made about it in which the pilot of the plane Ralph DeLoach, then in his 70s, was tracked down in California and taken back to Boga Boga for a reunion with some of the villagers who helped him and his crew escape from the ditched plane in 1943.

It is an amazing story and you can read all about it in my **Complete Guide to the B17 Black Jack Wreck**.



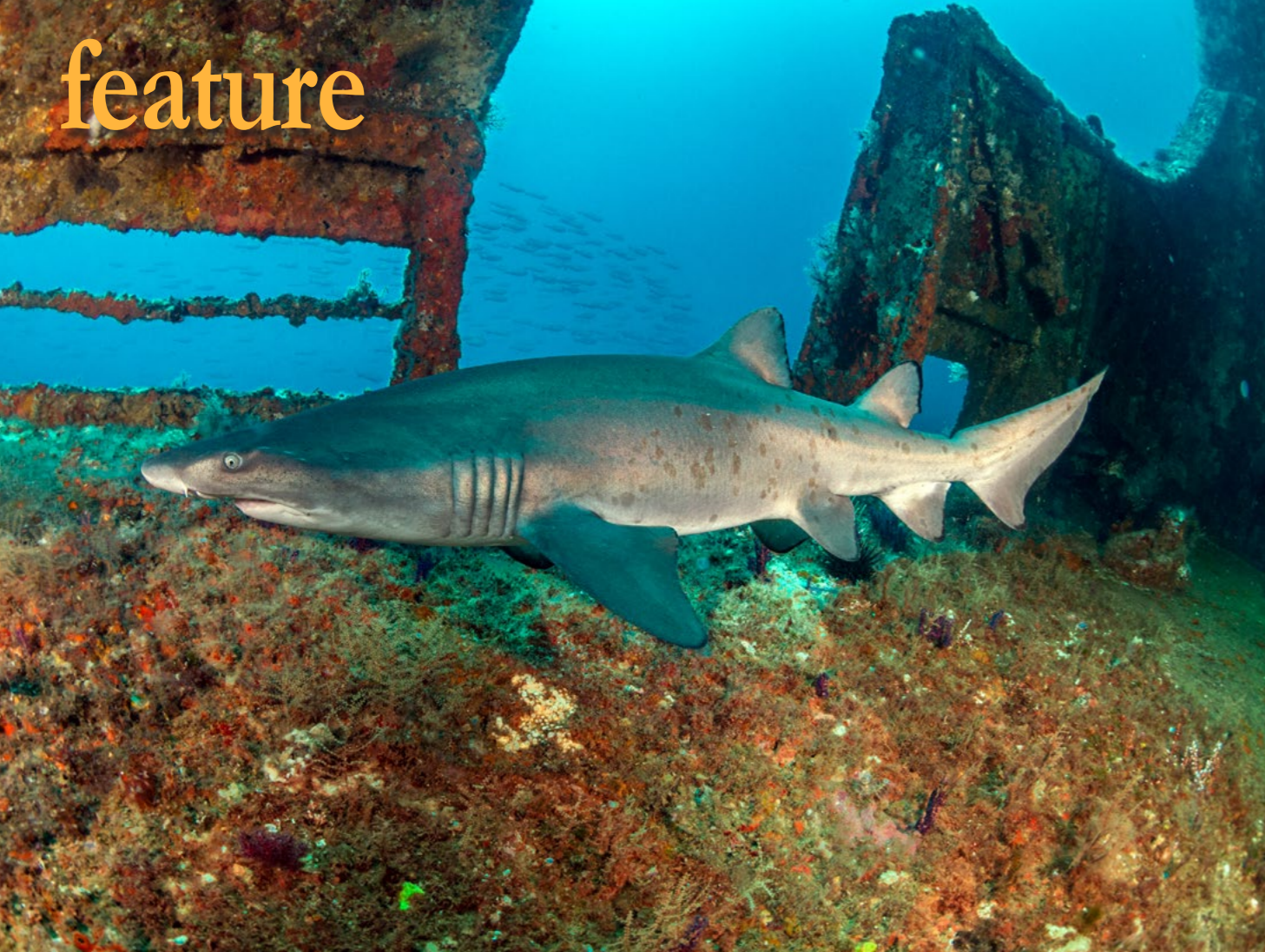
Black Jack propeller (above). Exposure: ISO 400, f/9, 1/60s; Boga Boga Village (right). Exposure: ISO 100, f/8, 1/125s. Camera gear: Nikon D300 camera, Sigma 17-70mm lens, Subal housing, dual Ikelite DS160 strobes

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Juvenile sand tiger shark swims around the main deck (left); Camera gear used for all images: Olympus OM-D E-M5 camera, Panasonic Lumix G fisheye 8mm f/3.5 lens, Nauticam housing, Sea&Sea YS-D1 strobes

pared and sunk as an artificial reef at a depth of 33m (110ft), 48km (30mi) off Morehead City. An intact and small vessel, *Spar* is easy to navigate even in low visibility. Resting on her keel, with a 45-degree list to port, *Spar* can be circumnavigated in just one dive. I saw schools of black jacks as well as scary-looking but gentle sand tiger sharks, which are a main attraction on the wreck. Inside the wreck, it is very spacious and there are lots of rooms to explore. There are ladders on the main wheelhouse and the main deck as well as other interesting features to photograph. I enjoyed diving this wreck because of its structure and the marine life found on it. I would love to go back and take more photos and videos to share. Visit: fitimage.nyc

SOURCES: OLYMPUSDIVING.COM, WIKIPEDIA.ORG, NC-WRECKDIVING.COM

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USCGC *Spar* (WLB-403), North Carolina, USA

Text and photos by Olga Torrey

I have gone wreck diving three times off the coast of North Carolina, which is nicknamed the "Graveyard of the Atlantic" because over 2,000 ships have sunk there. Many shipwrecks were caused by war, collision or weather. Indeed, weather conditions have to be considered when planning a trip to visit these time capsules under the sea. In a week-long trip, it is not unusual to get blown out half of the time. On my last visit there, I did a day trip to the 55m (180ft) sea-going buoy tender USCGC *Spar* (WLB-403) with Olympus Dive Center in Morehead City, North Carolina.

The *Spar* has an impressive history of achievement from convoy duty in Brazil during WWII to oceanographic operations through the Northwest Passage in the '50s (to become one of the first to circumnavigate North America), and in the '60s, logging over 27,358.85km (17,000mi) in northern Europe on a charting expedition. She was awarded gold marks for operations and seamanship so many times in the '80s and '90s that she was dubbed "The cutter with the most gold."

Spar was finally decommissioned on 28 February 1997, and the ship's main engines, generators and other equipment were removed and sold. In June 2004, her welded-steel hull was pre-



A black jack swimming over the main deck (above); A black jack swimming inside the main wheelhouse (right)





WWII dive bomber Ju 87 R-2, Zirje Island, Croatia

Text and photos by Claudia Weber-Gebert

At the end of September 2014, this WWII dive bomber was found by chance during a harpoon competition near the Croatian island of Zirje. The significant discovery caused a stir at the time, since only a few of the 5,752 bombers produced in Germany were still in good condition. The wreck is remarkably well preserved; it has even been said that it is the world's best-preserved Stuka bomber.

In May 2015, I had the opportunity to dive this wreck shortly after diving was allowed for dive operators with permits. The operator gave my buddy and me a ten-minute head start, before all the other divers in our group took the plunge to dive down to the wreck site. So, for a whole ten minutes, we had the Stuka bomber to our-

elves, a silent witness to the war. It made a great impression on me—also because I knew that the pilot had most likely survived. And, at that time, it had not yet been decided whether the wreck would stay on the seabed or be recovered and brought into a museum. So, it was not really certain whether or not it would be possible to dive the Stuka wreck again in the future. I have to admit, I felt a bit strange in this situation, but I focused on taking pictures and enjoyed my alone time with the wreck.

For now, the wreck is still underwater, hopefully available to many divers who visit the site after we did. It is an easy dive site, with a maximum depth at about 28m, and really brightly lit if the sun is shining and the visibility is good.

I am really proud of the fact that my photos of the Stuka bomber wreck have been used in many publications in Europe, including aircraft and dive magazines and books. For further reading, see my article in the **April 2016 issue #72**.



THIS PAGE: Scenes from WWII Stuka bomber wreck found near Zirje Island, Croatia



Engine of Ju 87 R-2 dive bomber on seafloor

