



Diver swimming between the WWI SMS *Cormoran* and the WWII *Tokai Maru*

The Tale of Two Wrecks of Guam

Text and underwater photos by Brandi Mueller

Guam's Apra Harbor is home to a unique set of sunken warships. It is the only place in the world where a World War I and a World War II wreck sit touching each other underwater, and they can both be dived on one tank. The calm, warm waters of Guam make for easy diving, and both wrecks can be mostly explored above 100ft. The story of how these ships sank is almost as interesting as the dive itself.



German merchant raider, SMS *Comoran*

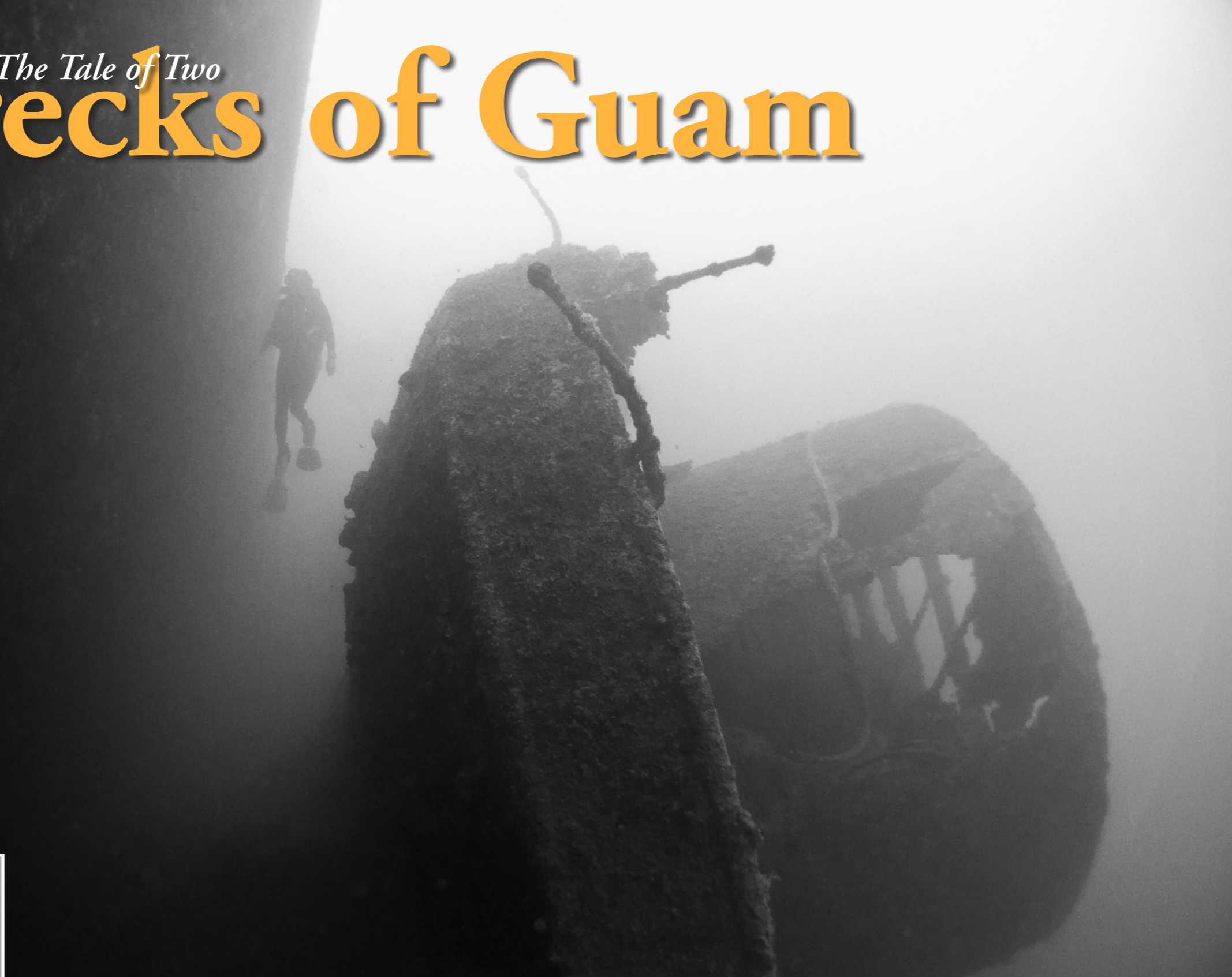
German Captain Adalbert Zuckschwerdt steered his ship, the SMS *Cormoran*, into Guam's Apra Harbor on 14 December 1914. With only 50 tons of coal left in the hold and not much food, he hoped the Americans of this U.S. territory would provide them with much needed supplies to continue their voyage. Although still a neutral party of WWI,

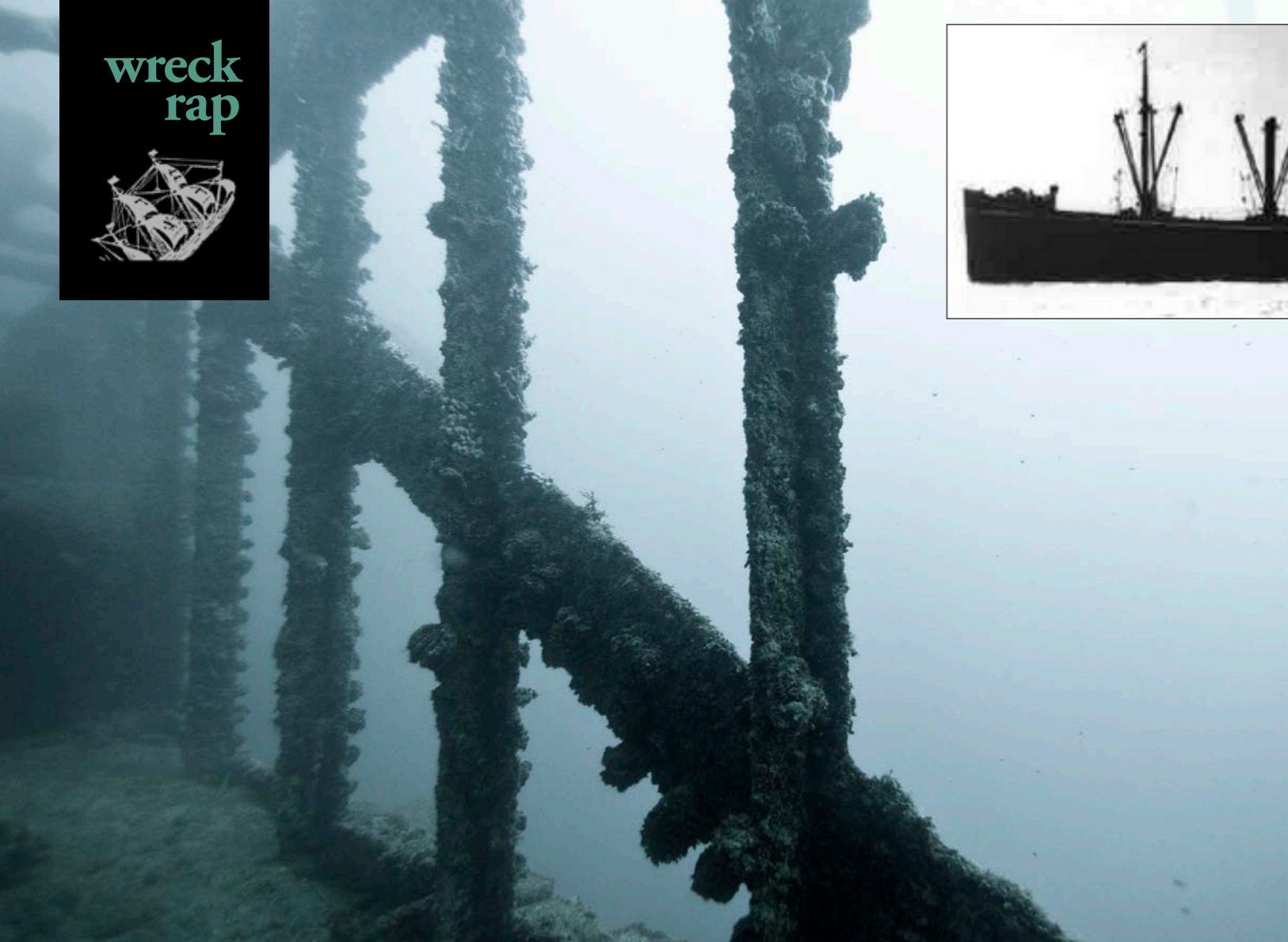
the Americans refused to give an adequate amount of coal to continue their voyage, in part because of their own short supply, thus preventing the vessel from leaving Guam. The ship and her crew stayed in Guam peacefully for over two years, many moving onto land and living as neighbors among the indigenous Chamorros and Americans.

The *Cormoran* started off as the *Rjasan*, built in a German shipyard in 1909. It was a 88-meter (290ft) passenger-cargo freighter built for Russia.

World War I

During World War I, in August 1914, the Russian *Rjasan* was captured by the Germans



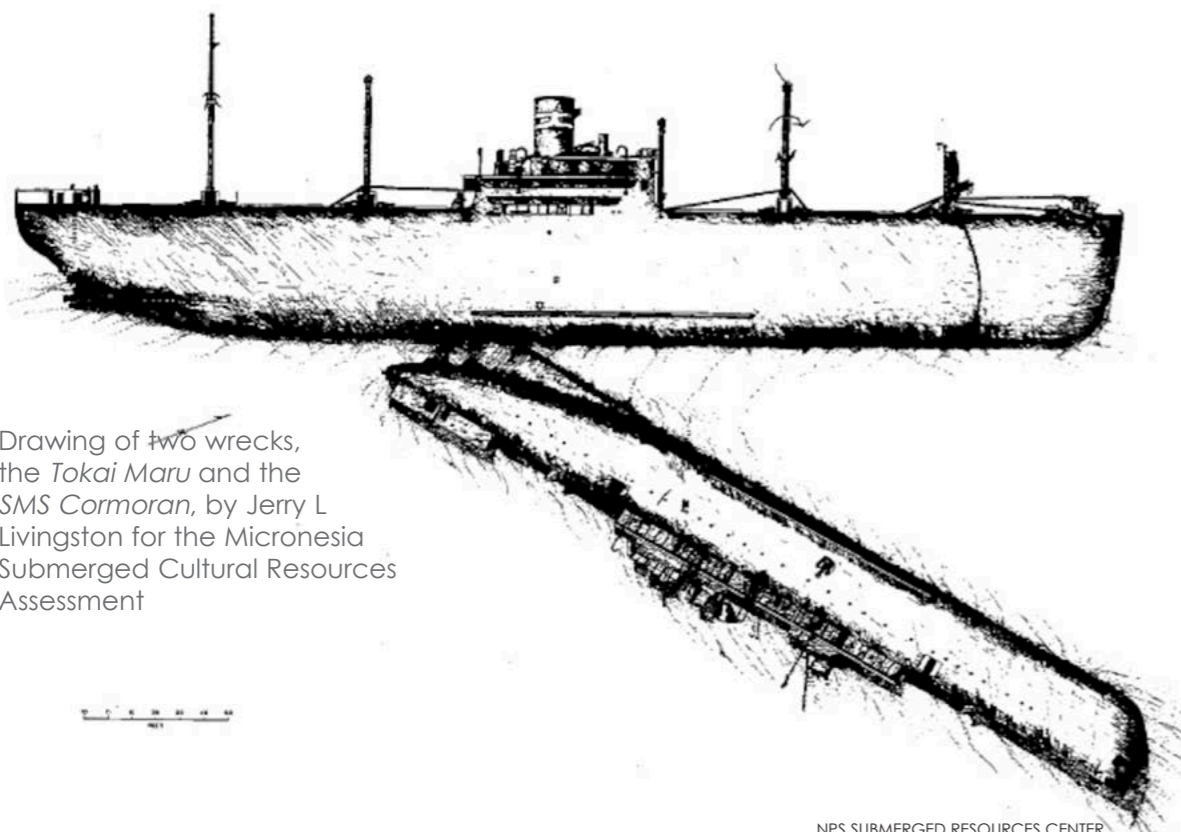


SMS Comoran (left); Tokai Maru (above); Impact point of the SMS Cormoran and the Tokai Maru (right)

off Korea by the SMS Emden. Converted to an auxiliary cruiser in the port of Tsingtao, Northern China, she was outfitted with guns salvaged from a disabled warship called the *Cormoran*, which had serious engine failures; she was renamed after that ship.

Once refitted for war, the SMS *Cormoran* took to

ing, the captain sent his ship and 13 crew to the bottom of the sea. These crewmembers are buried with full military honors in the Naval cemetery in Agana, Guam, and the rest of the crew were sent to Fort Douglas, Utah, for the duration of the war. This was the only hostile encounter between United States and German forces during the Pacific Ocean campaign of the war.



Drawing of two wrecks, the *Tokai Maru* and the SMS *Cormoran*, by Jerry L Livingston for the Micronesia Submerged Cultural Resources Assessment

the Pacific where she spent all her time avoiding allied warships and Japanese battleships. Prior to reaching Guam she had not sunk any enemy ships.

Scuttling the ship

News reached Guam of America's declaration of war on Germany on 7 April 1917, and in an attempt to prevent hostilities between the Germans living on Guam and keep the Guamanians from harm, the Americans asked Captain Zuckschwerdt to surrender. He agreed to surrender and asked if he could go to his ship to let his men know the news.

Upon returning to his ship, he ordered the crew to scuttle the vessel. As the Americans saw this happening, they fired a warning shot across the bow of the *Cormoran*, the first shot fired by Americans in WWI. Ignoring this warn-

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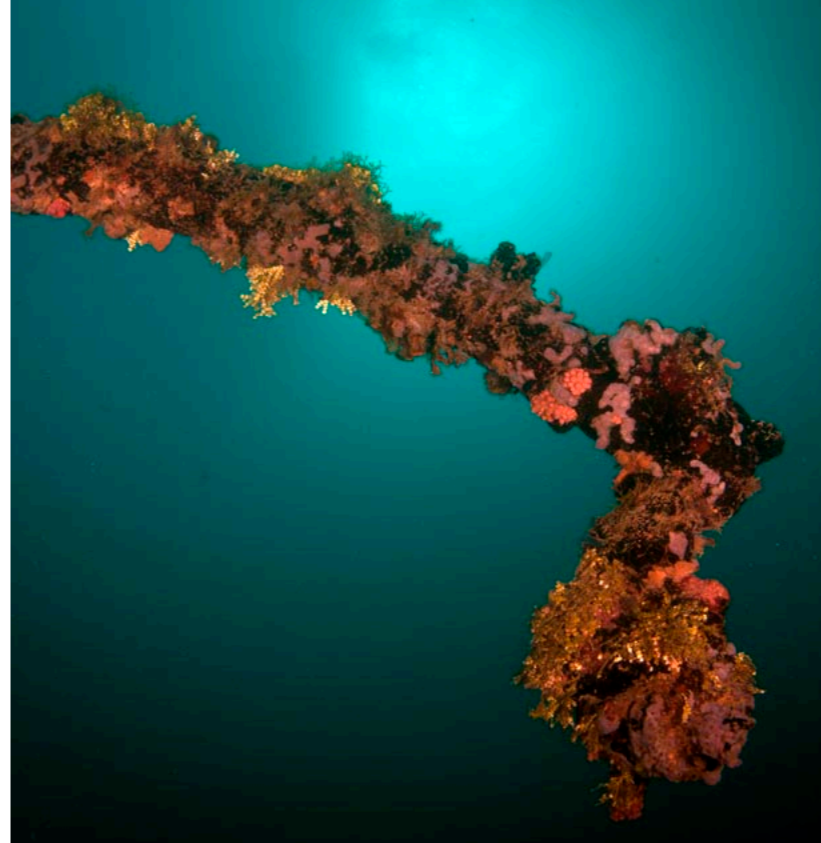
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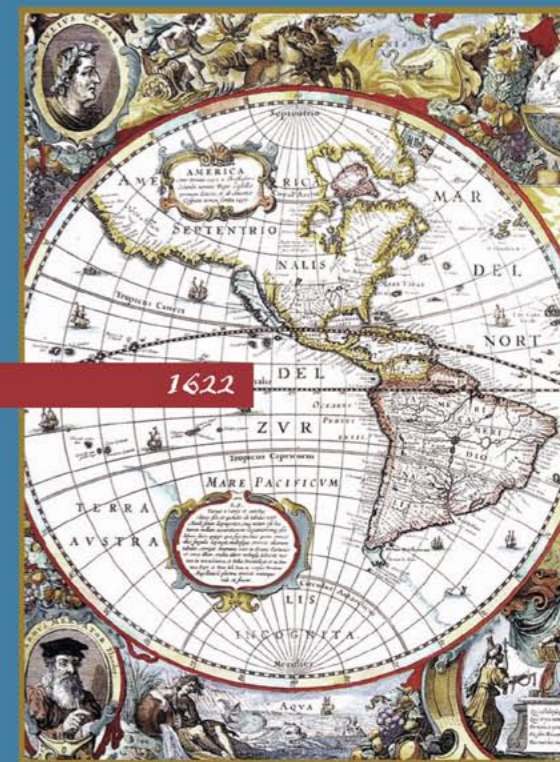


wreck rap

SMS Cormoran; Coral growth on davit on Tokai Maru (far right)



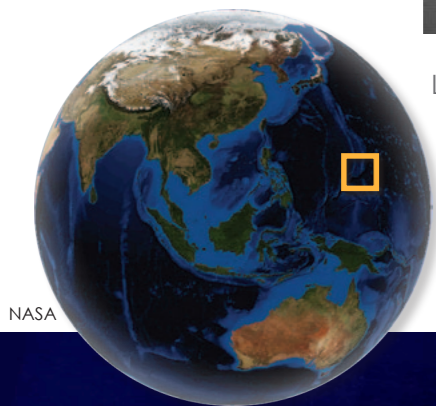
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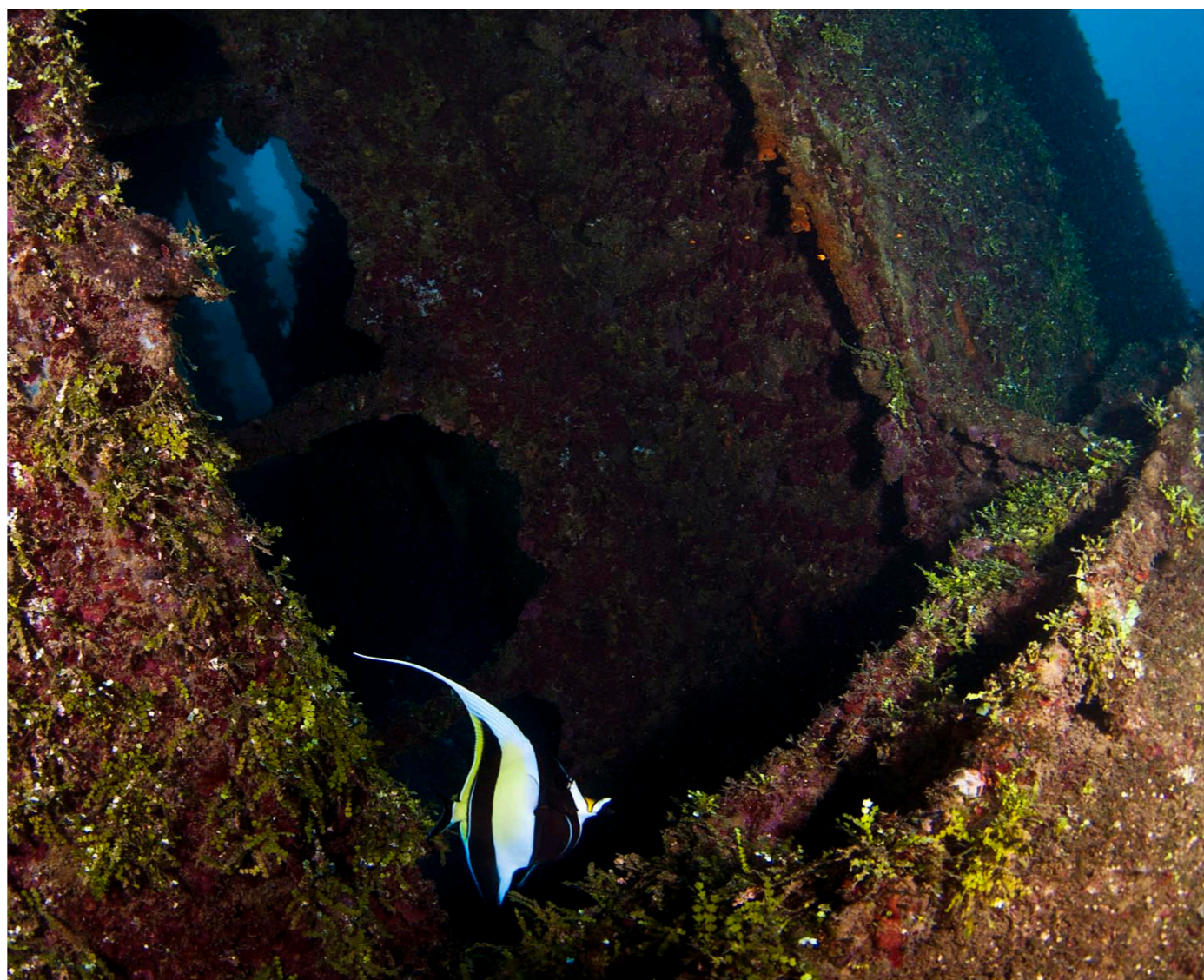


Location of Guam on global map

World War II

Almost 25 years and another war later, Guam was invaded by Japan. In 1941, Japan occupied Guam—the only United States territory occupied by Japanese forces during WWII. The *Tokai Maru* was a ship built by the Osaka Shosen Company as a Japanese luxury liner in 1930. It travelled from Tokyo to New York and was 134 meters (440ft) long and 18 meters (60ft) wide. In 1940, it was recommissioned as a freighter to transport personnel and war materials for the Japanese Imperial Navy.

On 24 January 1943, the U.S. submarine *Flying Fish* spotted the Japanese Imperial Navy freighter *Tokai Maru* in Apra Harbor. The submarine waited just outside the harbor for three days for it to leave. Giving up on the waiting, the *USS Flying Fish* fired two torpedoes, one missing com-

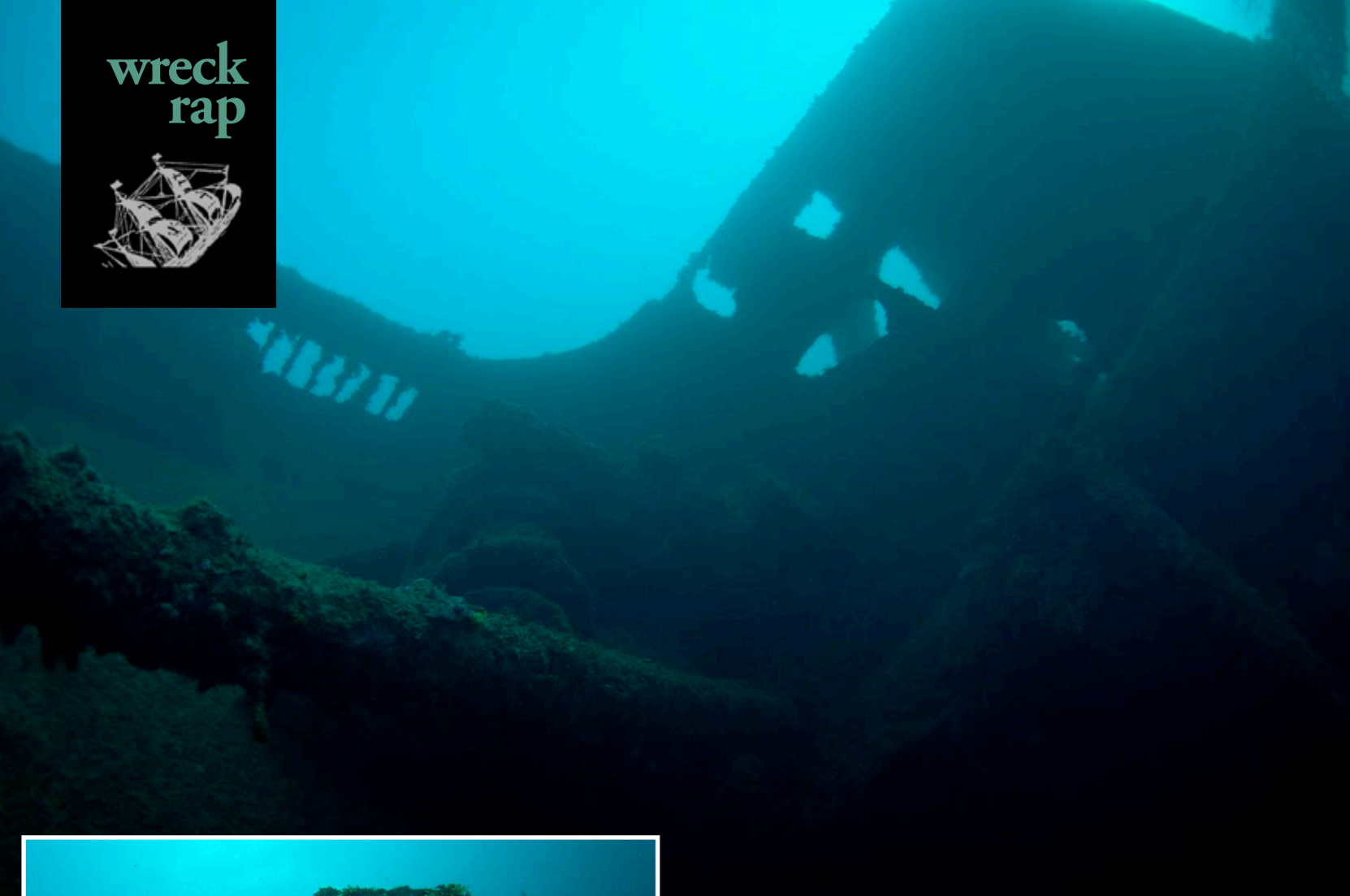


Moorish idol hides in the *Tokai Maru*



Apra Harbor

Map of Guam



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the wreck of the *Tokai Maru*

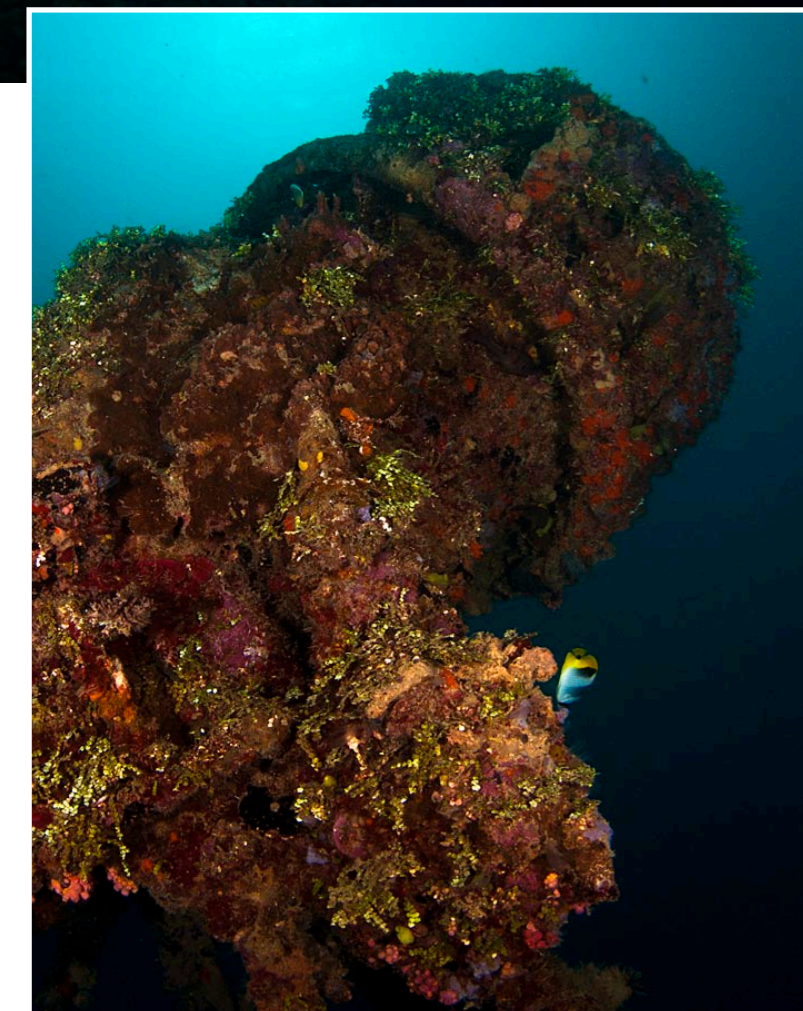
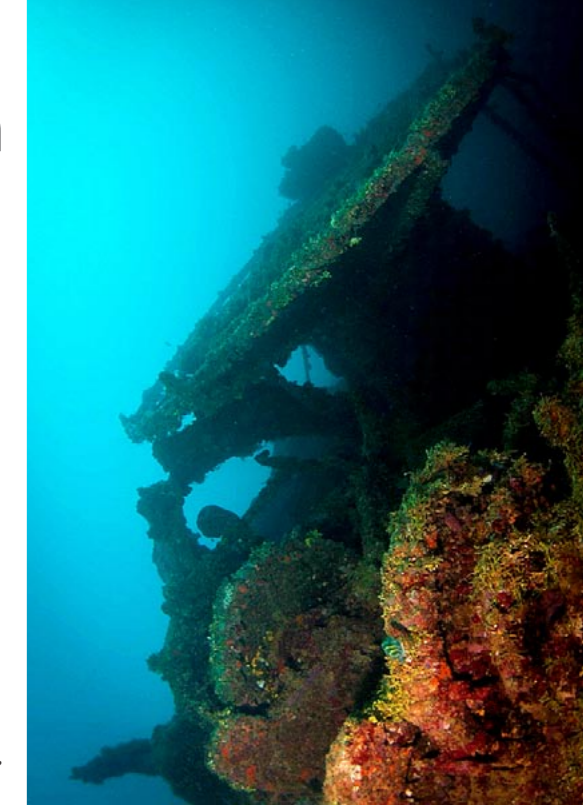
Guam

tinue across the ship to where it touches the *Cormoran* around 30 meters (100ft). Then divers explore the *Cormoran* first, the majority of that ship being deeper, during dive one. Often the second dive is used to explore the slightly shallower *Tokai Maru*. MDA does not lead dives, but for an extra cost will provide a guide. Unfortunately the location of these wrecks inside the harbor leads to varied visibility, usually 10-11 meters (35-40ft), depending on tide change and ship traffic in the harbor.

Guam also offers plenty

of other diving including a Japanese Val bomber, a 90-meter concrete barge called the *American Tanker* to provide a breakwater at the mouth of Apra Harbor, and spectacular reef diving with a lot of healthy hard corals, schools of fish and more anemone fish than one can count. ■

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pletely, running aground on a reef, and the other striking the *Tokai*, but not sinking her.

Seven months later, on 27 August 1943, another U.S. submarine, the *USS Snapper*, was given another chance to finish the job the *Flying Fish* started. They fired four torpedoes, three hitting and sinking the *Tokai Maru*, the fourth hitting another injured Japanese vessel, the *Nichiyo Maru*.

The *Tokai Maru* sank next to the *Cormoran* in Apra Harbor, with one small section touching each other. The *Tokai* rests in 36 meters (120ft) of water with an 85 degree list to her port. The upper forward bridge is the shallowest area start-

ing around 12 meters (40ft). Most of the superstructure is still intact, and the engine room still has two engines with intact catwalks. Depth charges can still be seen in the stern, and the holds contain bed and truck frames. The *Cormoran* sits in 36 meters on her port side.

Diving the wrecks

Only a 10-minute boat ride from shore, both wrecks can be seen on one dive, but most dive shops, including Micronesian Diver Association (MDA) offers weekly two-tank boat trips allowing for two dives on these wrecks. With the mooring attached to the *Tokai*, most divers descend to the *Tokai* and con-



Diver peers through interior of *Tokai Maru*