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Photos by Nick Shallcross
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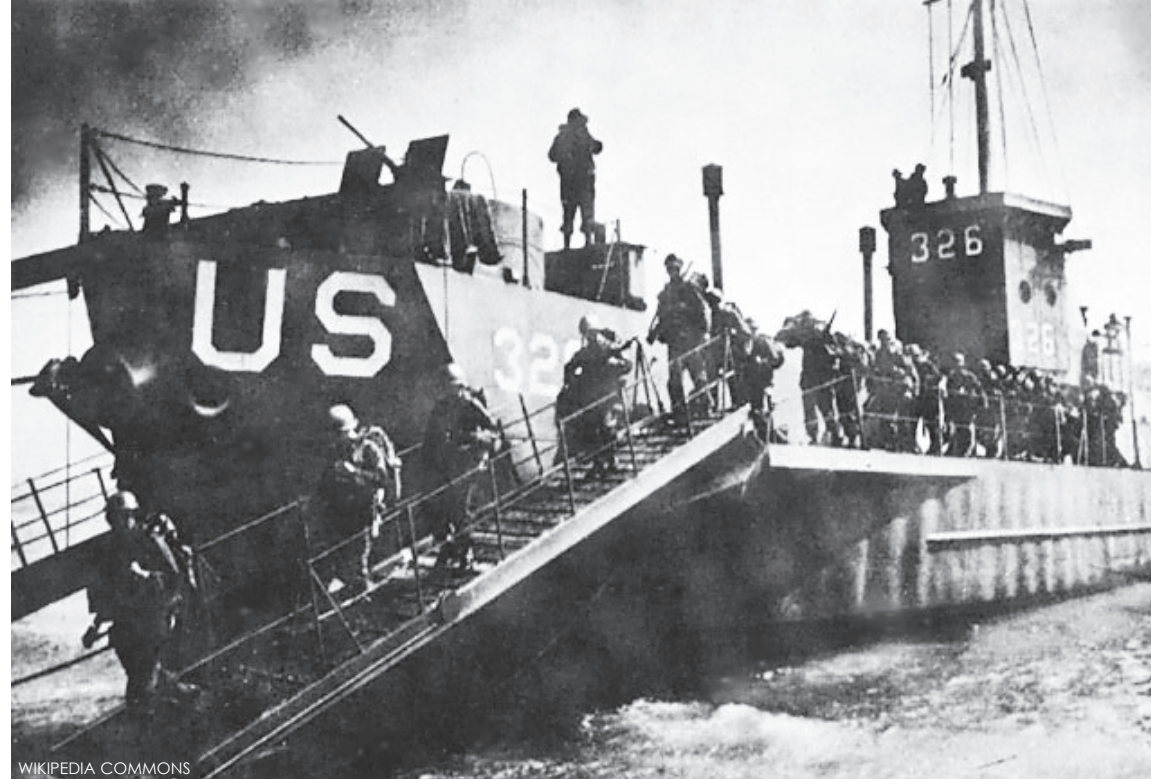
On a cold day in February 1944, little would the workers of the Commercial Iron Works in Portland, Oregon, have known of the fate and unlikely resting place of the USS LCI(L) 739—now known to those who visit her as the HTMS *Sattakut*. This was just one of the many ships built in the aftermath of Pearl Harbour, which saw the entry of the United States into World War II. The Americans were keen to exact revenge and stop the advance of the Empire of Japan across Southeast Asia, but for this they needed more ships. After seeing out her years in both the U.S. and Thai navies, The HTMS *Sattakut* has now found her final resting place in the Gulf of Thailand just off a little island called Koh Tao.



HTMS *Sattakut*



Troops exiting a Landing Craft Infantry during WWII; Beach landings at Okinawa during WWII (below center); 1945 U.S. postage stamp commemorating the Battle of Iwo Jima with the iconic photograph, *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima*, by Joe Rosenthal (bottom right)



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During the War

Commissioned on February 27 as a Landing Craft Infantry Large, she was assigned to the Asiatic-Pacific Theatre to assist with the war efforts against Japan. It was in September of that year when she finally saw action in the long running battle between the two superpowers when she participated in the capture and occupation of southern Palau islands between September and October of 1944.

With American military leaders predicting the invasion would last just a matter of days, it was soon clear that the Japanese had learned from previous mistakes and had themselves dug well into the hills behind the beach. Their strategic position led to one of the largest losses of life for U.S. forces in the Pacific, with their landing craft and troops reaching the beach amid

heavy fire from machine guns and artillery. The slow but steady advance of American Marines did, however, eventually lead to the surrender of the Japanese army on the island, with both sides incurring heavy losses.

With the Palau islands secure, U.S. forces moved on, securing other key islands and airfields in an attempt to cripple the Japanese and halt their advance across the Pacific. One such island would become part of one of the most controversial decisions made during the war, the invasion and occupation of



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Iwo Jima.

The 739 was reclassified to the USS LCI Gunboat 739, with the addition of larger guns, providing her with the much-needed firepower to deal with the heavily

defended Japanese. The naval fleet bombarded the island with shelling and mortar fire for three days running up to the landings, with little impact to the Japanese in their dugouts. Even with the piece of land being deemed useless to both the U.S. Navy and Air Forces, what followed was a gruesome and bloody five-week battle that saw more American troops killed or wound-

ed than Japanese forces for the first time in the war.

Although American success was almost guaranteed, the Japanese showed impressive military tactics in their defence of the island. With nowhere to retreat to, U.S. forces finally overcame the resilient Japanese, leading to one of the most iconic photographs of the war, *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima*, by Joe Rosenthal.

The USS LCI 739's next action came later that month during the invasion of Okinawa, the largest amphibious assault of the Pacific war. Landing craft such as the 739 played a huge



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Troops loading up ready for deployment



role in the invasion and were used for a variety of roles throughout this campaign.

As well as transporting troops for beach landings, they carried out vital roles including protecting underwater demolition divers, and creating smoke screens to hide the advancing fleet from enemy aircraft and artillery. For this, the 739 was armed with even more firepower, and was reclassified to a Landing Craft Infantry Mortar, with the addition of large heavy mortar cannons.

Between March and June of 1945, both sides suffered large loss of life throughout the long and gruelling invasion. However, the eventual capture of the island played a major role in the American advance. Situated just a short distance from mainland Japan, it gave the Americans the perfect base for their final assault on the Japanese.



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the sinking of HTMS *Sattakut*. The ship lists in its intended position waiting to be sunk while sailors look on from some of vessels in the large Thai Navy flotilla attending the event

a mecca for recreational divers.

The vessel spent some time being stripped clean by the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, readying for its final goodbye, leaving an empty shell with both the bow and stern cannons still attached.

The atomic bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, which came just a few months later, finally bought an end to the war in the Pacific, and after 1946, most Landing Craft Infantry were retired from duty and were either sold, scrapped or transferred to other nations. The 739 was one such vessel, and after receiving three battle stars for her services during the war, she was transferred to the Royal Thai Navy and reclassified as the LCI 742 or HTMS

Sattakut, where she would see out her years helping to transport Thai troops for training and duties.

The sinking

As part of an artificial reef project in Thailand, the HTMS *Sattakut* as well as many other vessels were donated by the Thai Navy to a number of locations around the country. It was chosen that the HTMS *Sattakut* would be sunk off the coast of Koh Tao, a small island in the Gulf of Thailand, and

All electronics, contaminants and engine parts were removed before she was deemed fit to sink.

On 18 June 2011, accompanied by a large flotilla from the Thai Navy, plus dozens of local dive boats keen to watch the vessel go down, the ship was towed into her intended position. In typical fashion, not everything went exactly to plan, with Mother Nature doing her best to intervene. Large waves, strong wind and a wall of sideways rain rolled



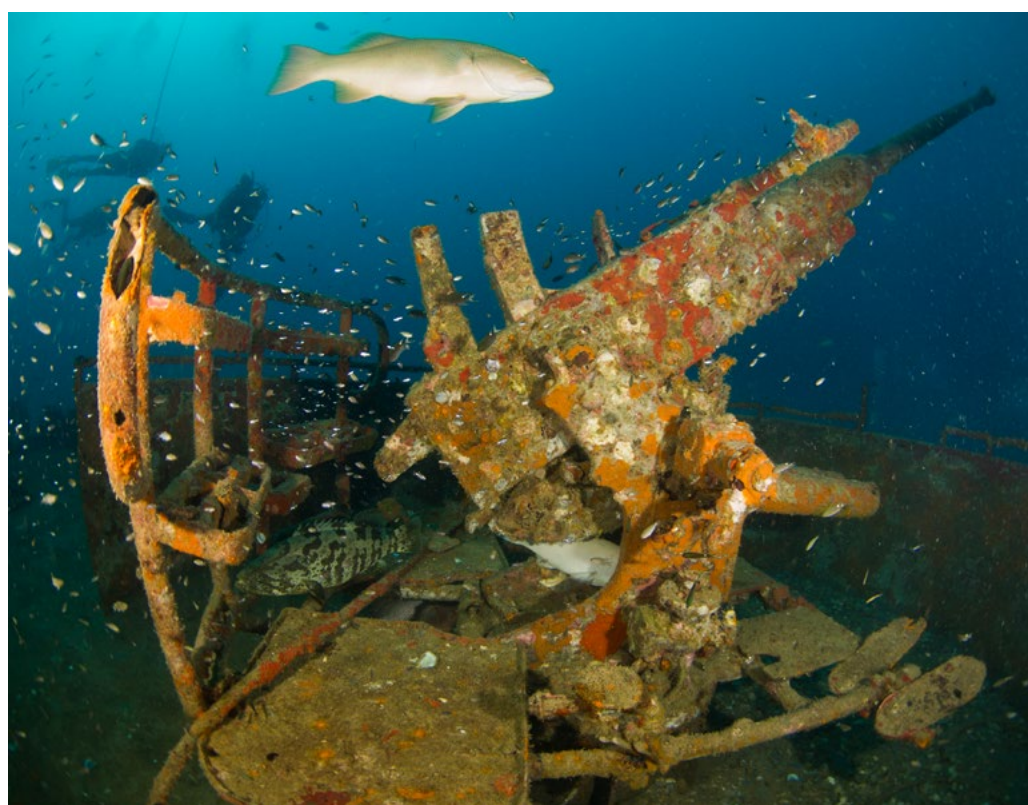
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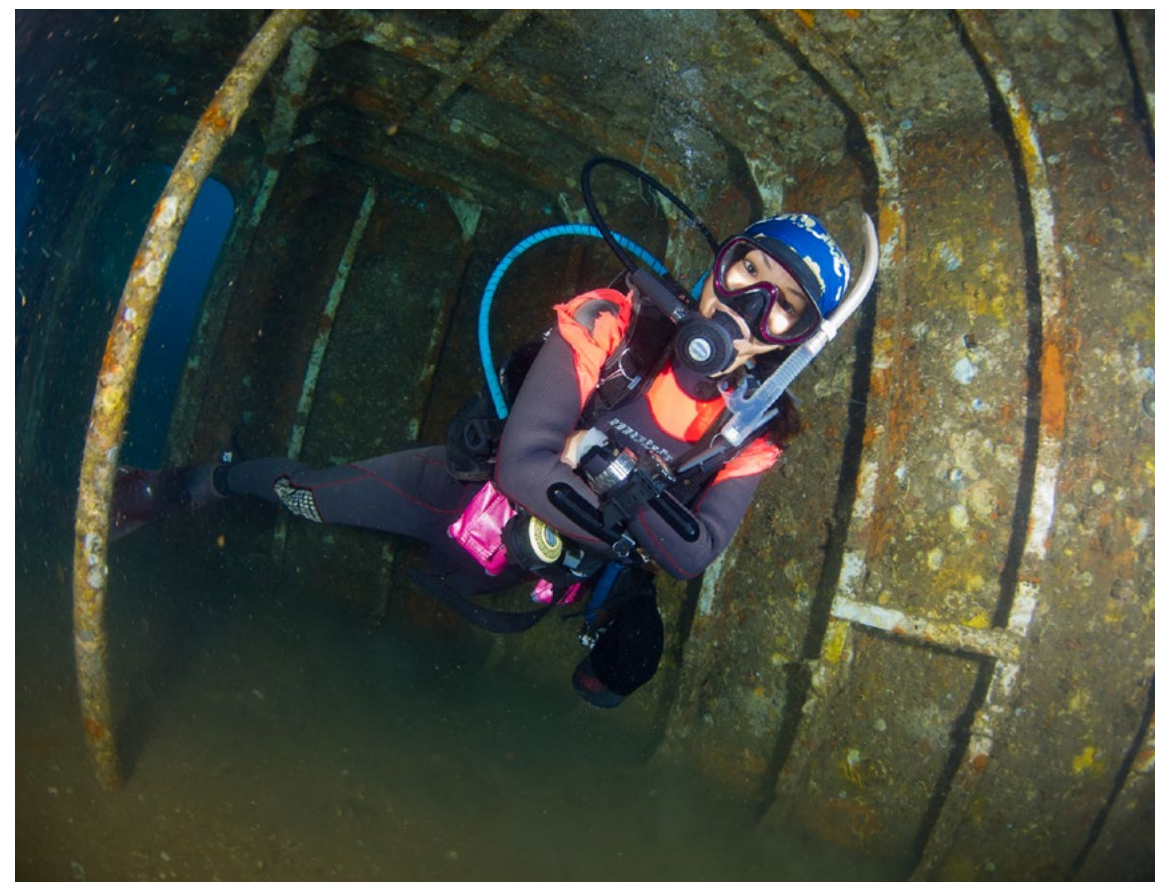
View from inside the old wheelhouse (top left); Bow of the *Sattakut* looms overhead (left); Diver exploring the wreck's interior (below)

in causing many of the onlookers to head back to the harbour leaving just the Thai Navy and a few dedicated spectators to watch her final act.

The rough weather caused the ship to drift out of position and roll over as she went down. She landed on her side on the sea floor slightly off from the intended area. A small amount of damage was done to the wreck as she hit the sea floor in a great cloud of silt, but this did not deter the hoard of local divers keen to get the first glimpse of Koh Tao's latest wreck. After a few days to let the silt and the wreck settle, the Thai Navy declared the wreck safe to dive and the divers rushed out and began diving her straight away.



Fish pass by the rear mounted gun on the wreck of the HTMS *Sattakut*



After around a month of successful diving, the decision was made to raise the wreck, placing her upright and in her intended position, away from the busy shipping lane. Diving was halted while a team of salvage experts was assembled, and with the help of a large crane and platform, the ship was moved to the position she can be found in today. Laying in around 30m of water just a minute swim from the large granite pinnacles of the neighbouring dive site, Hin Pee Wee, she sits in the ideal position to be accessed year round by divers of various levels of experience.



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New Release

The wreck

The wreck of the HTMS *Sattakut* has quickly become one of the most popular dive sites to visit on the island. Everyday, avid divers and students completing their Advanced Open Water, deep or wreck courses visit to marvel over the 48m-long ship.

Over the three years she has been down, the wreck has become home to a huge abundance of marine life from tiny flatworms and nudibranches to large schools of snapper and trevally. Even a few of the famous yet illusive Koh Tao whale sharks have been spotted passing by the wreck in the clear blue water.

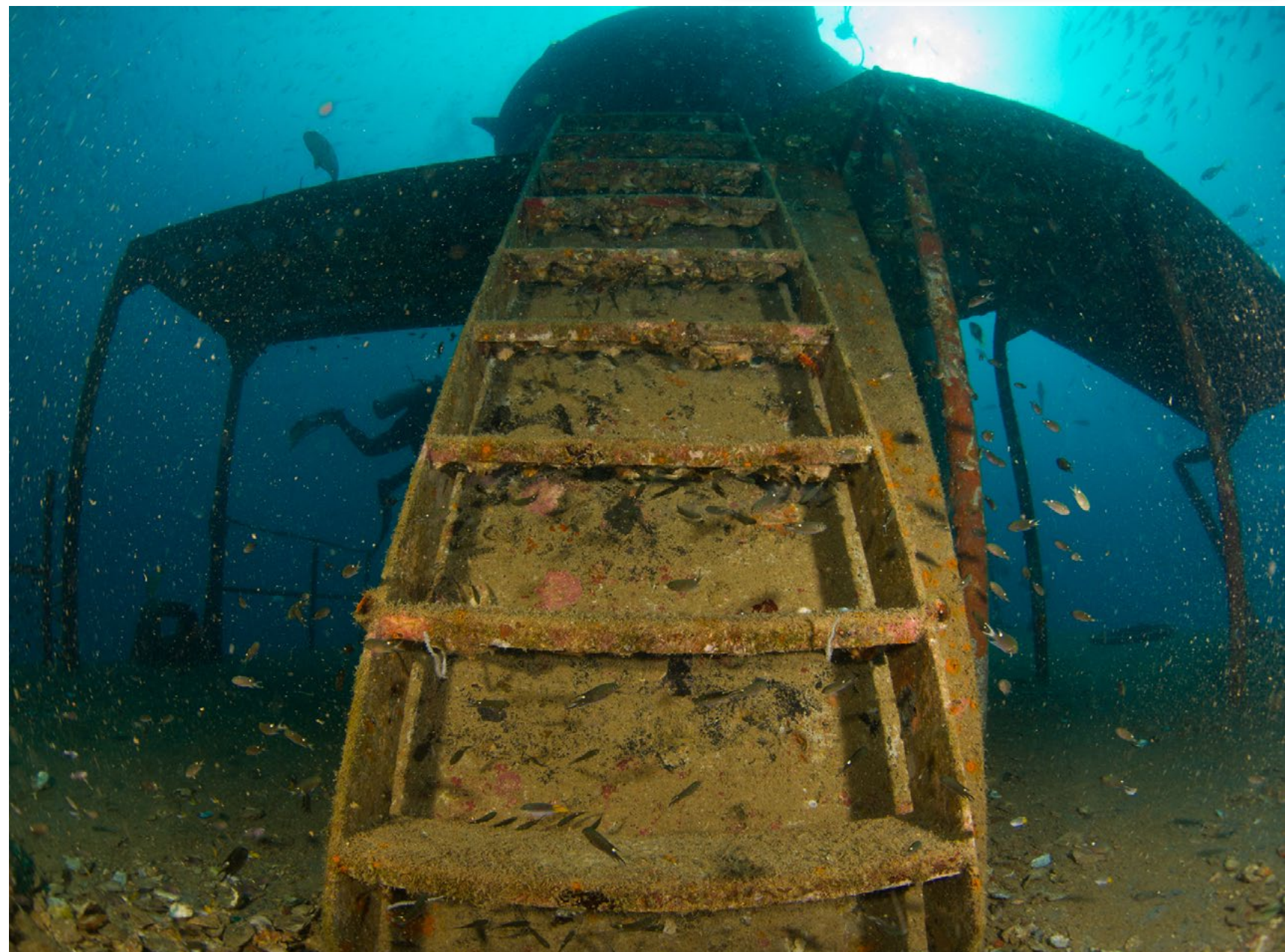
Inside the wreck, schools of tiny glassfish and juvenile barracuda can sometimes be found hiding in the safety of the large



empty hull.

Descending down the buoy line, the first thing to appear is

the large front mounted cannon on the bow of the ship, an exciting sight for the newly cer-



Main stairway leading to the wheelhouse (above); Diver swims above the front canon (left); Diver emerging from the wreck's interior (top left); Sign reading 'WRECK DIVE ONLY' warns untrained divers (top right)





wreck rap

Hatches with their welding breaking away



tified students and experienced divers alike. The bow of the ship soon looms over you as you descend down towards the sea floor. Exploring the sides of the wreck you can peer in through the many portholes, allowing a peek into the inner compartments of the ship. Swimming the



length of the vessel you soon find yourself at the wreck's deepest point, at its stern where the rear

mounted cannon aims out off the back and into the blue. This is often the murkiest part of the dive

with occasional thick thermoclines lying between 25 and 30 meters.

Heading back along the main deck and up a set of stairs, the old lookout and wheelhouse appear in front of you, towering over the rest of the wreck where you can take in the same view of the wreck once shared by the ship's commander and officers.

All over the wreck there are various entry and exit points for trained wreck and technical divers, as well as students learning wreck diving techniques in relatively safe and relaxed surroundings. Due to the ship being cleaned and emptied, the inside of the wreck is home to large open chambers and

unobstructed passageways to explore the inner sections of the vessel. Some of the deeper areas

have been welded shut, minimizing risk to the overly curious diver. However, over time, some of these have rusted away or been removed to allow further exploration.

The wreck has certainly become the largest and most popular artificial reef in the waters surrounding the island. With the huge boost in tourism, local dive centres have benefited greatly by the addition of the wreck, as well as giving Open Water students a great excuse to stay on for a few more days once their course has finished!

It is a far cry from the cold iron works in Oregon 70 years ago, but the HTMS *Sattakut* now joins the thousands of other wrecks around the world in the oceans depths, showing that something with such destructive power can also form

the basis of new life, and promote the creation of coral reefs, providing a habitat for fish and other marine life in which to thrive. □

Nick Shallcross is a British underwater photographer based in the Gulf of Thailand. More of his work can be seen at www.nickshallcrossphotography.co.uk

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Portholes on the old wheelhouse (above); Glassfish surround the rear mounted gun (left)





WWI Russian submarine located by Estonian divers

Estonian divers have discovered what they believe to be one of Russia's first battle submarines. The *Akula* (or *Shark*, in English) was the first Russian submarine able to cruise long distances. In 1912, *Akula* made the world's first multi-torpedo volley with five torpedoes.

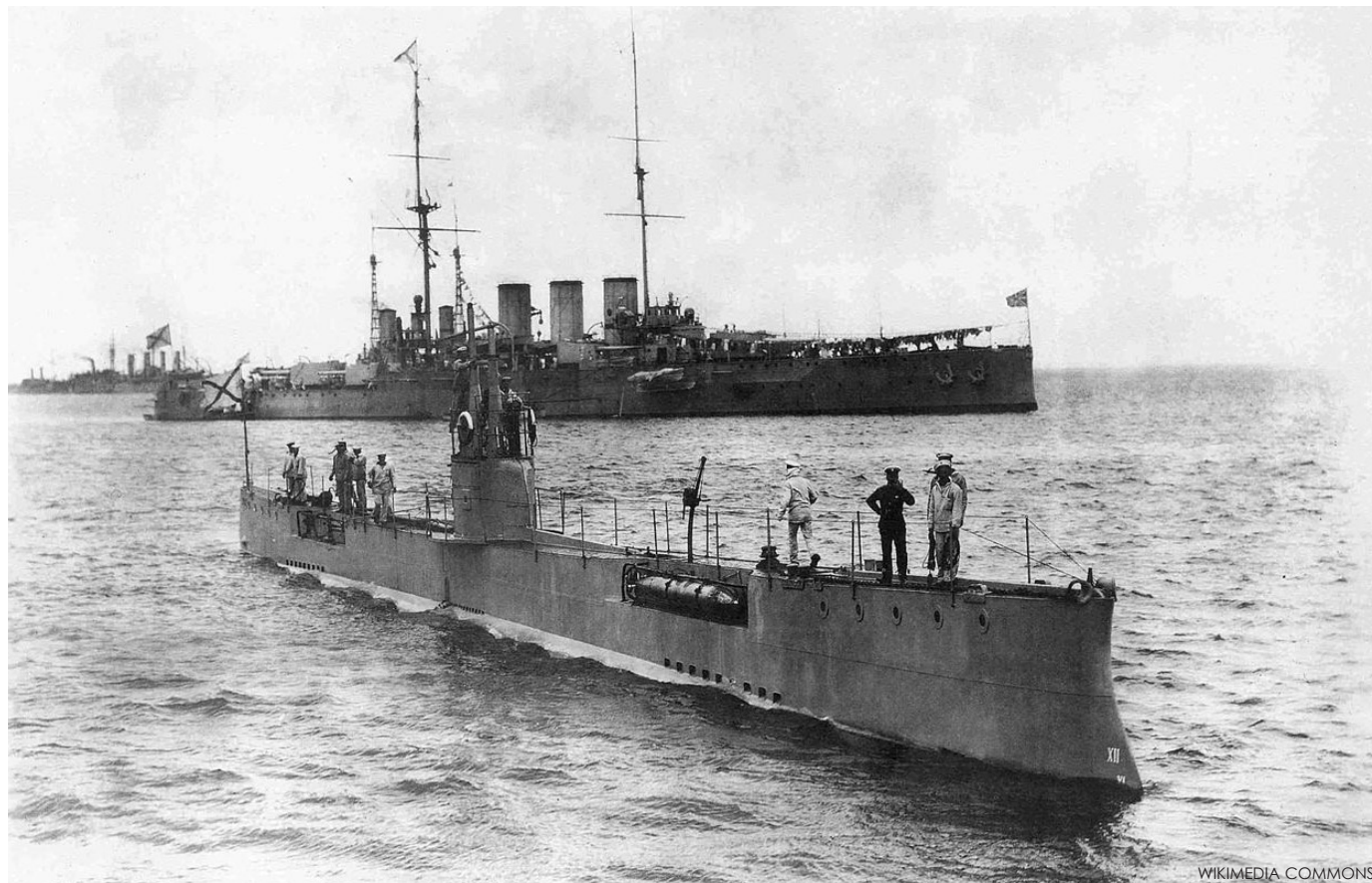
The 400-ton craft, commissioned in 1911, was the biggest in the pre-revolutionary fleet. During the First World War, she served in the Baltic Fleet making 16 patrols and unsuccessfully attacked the German coastal defense ship SMS *Beowulf*.

In November 1915 during her 17th patrol, she struck a mine and sank near Hiiumaa with the loss of all 35 seamen and came to rest at a depth of about 30 meters.

Last month a vessel matching the *Akula's* description was found at the bottom of the Baltic Sea by divers from the company Technical Diving Estonia, Delfi.ee reported.

Russian and Latvian divers then joined for a fresh expedition with the Estonian team after hearing the sub had a blown-off nose cone and three distinctive propellers.

"That made us think it could be the famous *Akula*, but we weren't sure until we made the dive," said diver Konstantin Bogdanov to the U.K. daily the *Telegraph* in a telephone interview. "Part of the outer shell of the craft at the stern was still intact and suddenly we could see, through the shells stuck to the hull, the word 'Akula' in white lettering." □



Imperial Russian submarine *Akula* (Russian for "shark") and armoured cruiser *Ryurik*, 1913



USS *Houston* off San Diego, California, in October 1935

Wreck confirmed to be WWII U.S. cruiser

Navy divers from the United States and Indonesia confirmed that a sunken vessel in the Java Sea is the World War II wreck of the USS *Houston*, sunk by the Japanese in 1942.

It serves as the final resting place for about 700 sailors and Marines. The ship carried 1,068 crewmen, but only 291 sailors and Marines survived both the attack and being prisoners of war.

Resting off the west coast of Java, Indonesia, the ship is a popular recreational dive site, U.S. Navy said.

In recent months, Navy archaeologists worked with Indonesian Navy divers to survey the wreck over the course of 19 underwater searches, U.S. Pacific Fleet commander Admiral Harry Harris said on Monday. The Navy History and Heritage Command confirmed that the recorded data is consistent with the identification of the former *Houston*.

Disturbances

Admiral Harry Harris added that divers have documented evidence the watery gravesite has been disturbed. Assessments conducted in June to determine the condition of the *Houston* found that hull rivets, a metal plate and unexploded ordnance were removed from the ship. There is also oil actively seeping from the hull.

Officials are working on measures to keep the site from further disturbance.

Following the battle of Java on 27 February 1942, USS cruisers *Perth* and *Houston* steamed into Banten Bay where the two ships came under attack from a Japanese battlefleet on

February 28.

During the battle that ensued, the *Houston* was struck repeatedly by torpedoes. Captain Albert Rooks was killed by a bursting shell at 00:30 and as the ship came to a stop. Japanese destroyers moved in, machine gunning the decks. A few minutes later, *Houston* rolled over and sank.

Houston's fate was not fully known by the world for almost nine months, and the full story of her last fight was not told until after the war was over and her survivors were liberated from the prison camps. □

SOURCE: DAILY MAIL ONLINE





On 11 September 1952, the C-45 was on a routine flight from Bedford, Massachusetts to Griffis Air Force Base near Rome, New York, when the left engine began failing about 40 miles southeast of Utica



Shipwreck hunters discover U.S.A.F. aircraft lost 62 years ago

USAF C-45 aircraft found in deep water in Lake Ontario off Oswego, New York, by shipwreck explorers.

The C-45 is almost totally intact. The fiberglass nose cone is missing as are the vertical stabilizers. One of the blades of the left propeller broke off and lies nearby on the bottom. Part of the windshield was broken and the left side of the body behind the wing has been

torn away.

The C-45, the military version of the Beech Model 18, remained relatively intact after plunging into the lake on 11 September 1952. The airplane was abandoned midflight after the left engine failed and all five aboard parachuted to safety. The C-45 traveled another 65 miles after all aboard evacuated before finally crashing into

Lake Ontario. Town residents saw a plane circling out over the lake just before it plunged into the water.

The current shipwreck team was quite surprised when the image of an aircraft appeared on their sonar display as it was well beyond the mile offshore as reported by the few eye witnesses to the crash. □

Treasure discovery on 1715 wreck off U.S. State of Florida



BWVI recovered a beautiful gold coin along with a number of silver coins and other shipwreck related artifacts

Blue Water Ventures International (BWVI) working off the U.S. coast at Ft Pierce, Florida, recovered a beautiful gold coin along with a number of silver coins and other shipwreck related artifacts.

The Douglas Beach Wreck is one of the richest Spanish galleon shipwreck sites off the coast of Florida and in the past has produced thousands of gold coins and tens of thousands of silver coins as well as significant amounts of gold jewelry and a wealth of artifact materials both of intrinsic and historical value.

Though a majority of its work is done in virgin territory on one of

the 1715 Fleet wrecks site, known as the Douglas Beach Wreck, BWVI's Captain John Brandon and the M/V *Endeavor* crew made the discovery during the exploration of an excavated area of the site.

Along with the coins were discovered broken pieces of Kang Hsi Chinese porcelain, shards of pottery, ships spikes, encrusted objects and scattered ballast stones—all significant archaeological indicators of potential future recoveries.

BWVI believes its recent discoveries may point the way to future significant discoveries in unexplored areas of the Douglas Beach Wreck site. □



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