

Text and photos by René B. Andersen

The *Oldenburg*, which was originally named *Pungo*, was built in 1914 to carry bananas between Cameron and Germany. It was drawn into World War I in 1915, put in German service and rebuilt as a raider ship. René B. Andersen shares the story of the ship and takes us on a dive to the wreck.



Historical photo of *Oldenburg* in Gdynia

WWI raider ships were merchant vessels and preferably refrigerator ships because they were faster than regular ships. They were equipped with hidden cannons and mines and sailed under false names and flags, with camouflaged armaments and crew. Cloaked in this manner, the raiders were able

to get past the English blockade, after which they were free to lay mines or approach enemy cargo ships in order to raid or sink them.

When *Pungo* was rebuilt as a raider ship, it was fitted with four 15cm cannons and a 10.5cm cannon, along with two torpedo tubes and 500

mines. The raider then undertook several raids in the Atlantic Ocean and the Kattegat, Skagerrak and Baltic seas from 1915 to 1919, during which the vessel switched names several times, from *Pungo* to *Möve* to *Vineta*.

During this period, the ship captured and sank 42 ships. Among its

many victims was the British battleship *HMS King Edward*, which was sunk by one of its mines. Two other casualties were the English ship *Georgic*, which was sunk with 1,200 horses on board, and the cargo ship *Otaki*, which was armed and resisted but could not match its opponent, *Möve*. This made

Oldenburg Wreck

German Raider & Cargo Ship Through Two World Wars





The stern at 75m (left); One of the many gun turrets fallen from the wreck (above); There are still portholes on the wreck (right). Before the *Oldenburg* sank, it was badly burnt, leaving open spaces that now allow access inside.



Air attack on *Oldenburg* in Vadheim in 1945 during World War II

Möve the most successful raider ship. But the war ended for Germany in 1918, and after the Treaty of Versailles, the ship was handed over to English ownership as a war reparation. Now renamed *Greenbrier*, it once again freighted bananas. Then, in 1933, a German shipping company bought the ship and named it *Oldenburg*.

WWII cargo ship

During WWII, *Oldenburg* was enlisted into marine service once again but with a quieter assignment as a cargo ship sailing between Germany and Norway for the German occupiers. But before entering service, the vessel was outfitted with anti-aircraft and ship guns. It looked like the ship would make it through the war, until one

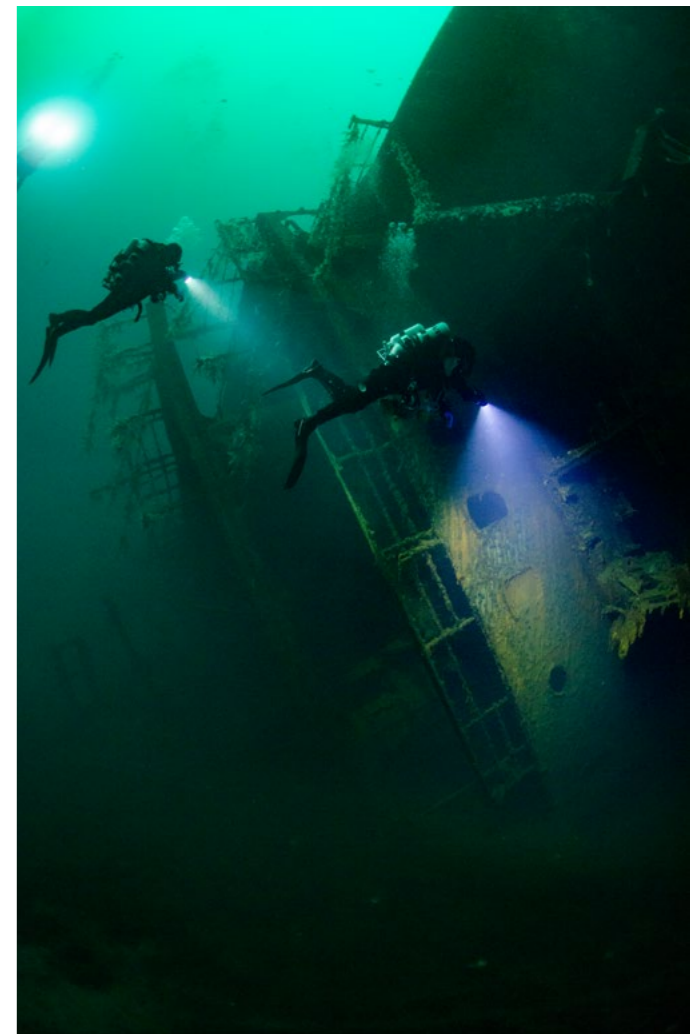
fateful day on 7 April 1945, when it was at anchor on the western side of Vadheim in Norway's Sognefjorden, with a cargo of fish destined for Germany. *Oldenburg* was part of a convoy with another merchant vessel and two outpost ships, V-5301 and V-5302, which were old whaling boats that were armed.

In the morning, they came under attack from 21 English Beaufighters (which were heavily armed with machine cannons and rockets) and their escort of 16 Mustang fighter aircraft. If the crews of the convoy vessels thought that the high mountains around the fjord would offer them some protection, they were mistaken. The ship's anti-aircraft guns started firing but in vain, and several rockets hit

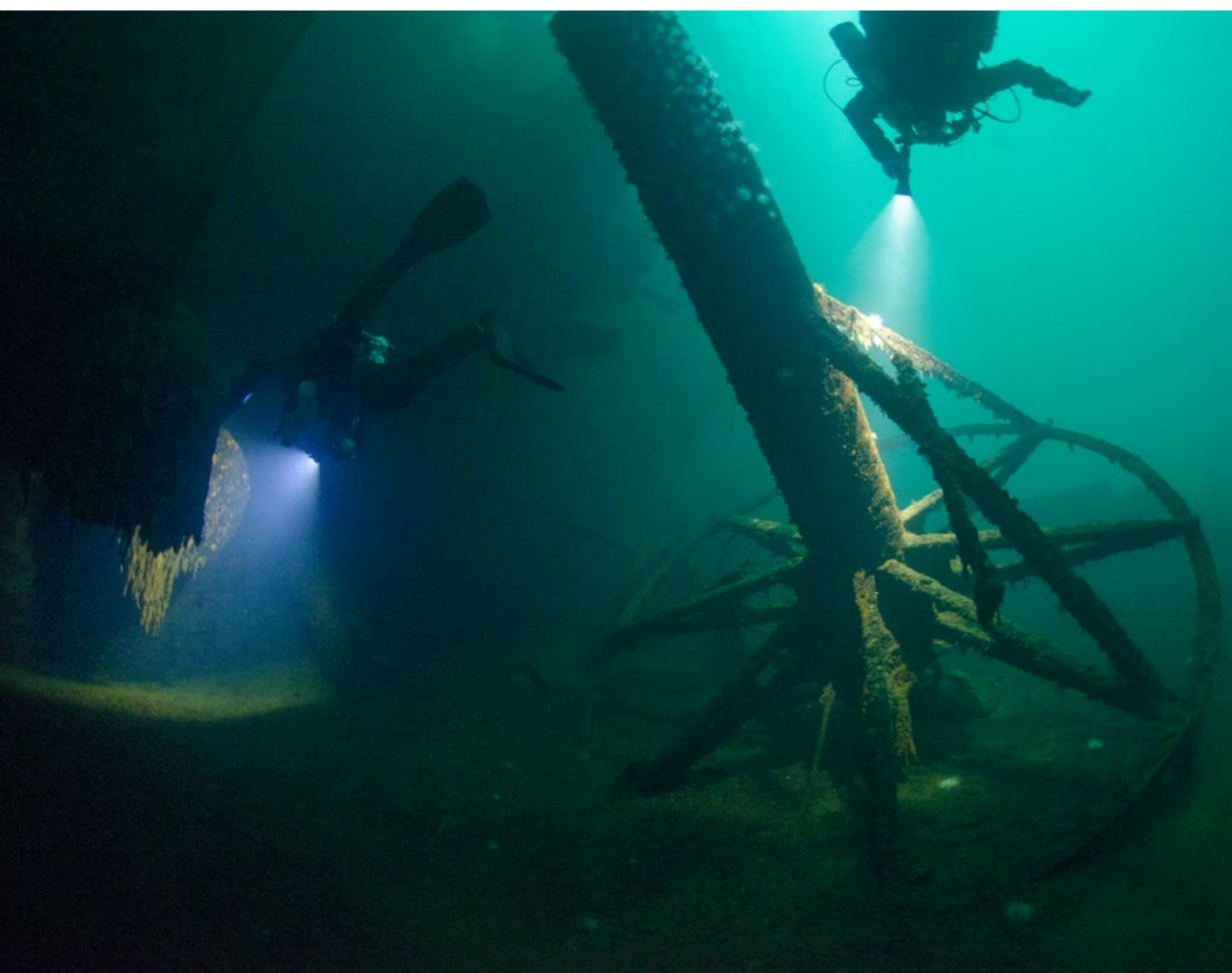
Oldenburg under the waterline, after which the ship took on water and began to sink.

There is an old picture in which *Oldenburg* is shown lopsided and burning. Seven anti-aircraft personnel and only one of the ship's crew were wounded in the attack. Albert Carr, a former pilot in the 489th squadron, who took part in the attack, visited Vadheim in 1987. He recalled that he expected a warm welcome and that was exactly what he got. German ships were generally well-armed, and although his own aircraft was hit, he still managed to fly it back to base.

Afterwards, the English aircraft came into battle with German aircraft in the outer part of Sognefjorden. The German aircraft came from a base



Diver at Oldenburg's stern at 27m (right); In Vadheim, a small road leads to a parking lot with shore access to the wreck. The buoy in the background marks Oldenburg's location (below).



Divers at the crow's nest, which has fallen to the sea floor (above)



near the city of Bergen. Both sides suffered losses. The other cargo ship, *MS Wolfgang L.M. Russ*, survived the attack, with one fatality and three wounded. It was later sunk on the 4th of May in Danish waters around Århus, while it was on the way to Germany with ammunition.

Vadheim

To get closer to the wreck (which lies on the western side of the fjord, if you are driving on E39), one can take the small road (50m before or after the river on the western side of the city) that goes down to a red house and a larger parking area. It is on private property, but the owner does not mind at all if you park there, as long as you put money in the mailbox,

which is placed near the staircase. It is a fair arrangement, and in return, he has put up a staircase, so it is easy to get into the water. I have spoken with the owner a few times about his plans, which is to build a rental house that would be perfect for divers.

From the parking area, you can see the 80m out to where the wreck is located, and there is normally a buoy on it. Otherwise, check norgebilder.no. Zoom in and you can see the buoy.

Diving

Descending to the wreck, the first thing you will notice is the stern, at a depth of 27m, and it is clear to see how the ship is resting on its starboard side. The stern, with its big hawse-pipes, rises some metres above the

sea bottom, and it appears the wreck has slid down the slope. The anchor and chain are gone, but the anchor winch is still on the deck.

A little farther down lies a platform for anti-aircraft cannons, and possibly a 20mm flak gun. There is steel plating around the edge, but it lies upside-down in the mud, and it appears as though the gun is still there. After the first cargo hold, one comes to the mast and crane arms, which have fallen down to the sea floor with some cables still connected to the railing. It looks interesting the way the cables appear as if they are overgrown. The crow's nest still hangs on the mast. It was probably where crew members stood on the lookout, scouting for ships during raids.



A lifeboat davit festooned with peacock worms and sealoch anemones (above); The ship's bell was salvaged in the '80s, with its old name *Möve* (right).

The bell was salvaged in the late '80s, although it was hard to find because it was located above the crow's nest where no one had thought to look for it.

The superstructure is at a depth of around 45m and is still in good condition, with its two levels with railings around the rim. There is even glass in some of the windows, but the bridge is missing, or rather, it is lying in a pile on the sea bottom, because it was just made of wood. You can still see the bolt holes, after the steering wheel console, which was salvaged in the early '90s. This could not have been an easy task, considering its 240kg weight. By coincidence, I got in contact with wreck expert Morten Stridh, who

was nice enough to send me a photo of the steering wheel console in perfect condition, as well as a photo of the ship's bell, with the ship's old name *Möve* on it.

Part of the wooden deck has rotted and has large holes through which one can swim. But with the wreck's age and the silty bottom, one must be very careful. In 1990, a diver lost his life doing this. Behind the bridge, I saw a milky-white fog that continued downward, limiting the visibility. Maybe it had something to do with the fresh water from rivers in the surrounding area.

There were several davits for the lifeboats, which were nicely overgrown with peacock worms and sealoch anemone. There



COURTESY OF MORTEN STRIDH

was also some sort of structure, but when I looked at the old photos of the ship, I saw that this was where the ship's funnel once stood. I must admit I did not look for it on the seabed.

Sunlight streamed down into the engine room. There was still glass in some of the portholes and some of the covers were open. Here, it is possible to look down and see inside the ship, but I did not get to do so, because I was occupied with photographing the wreck.

Farther down, there was one more structure, and in front of it stood what looked like a pressure



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Diver at the wreck's propeller (above, top right and right); The ship's wheel was salvaged in the early '90s and restored with great result (left). The only thing that is not original is the woodwork on the wheel and manometer discs. Restoration has taken ca. 100 hours and cost over NOK 15,000 (US\$1,438), according to wreck expert Morten Stridh.

in the turrets. I will definitely take a closer look next time.

The second mast also had a nicely decorated deck with lots of tube-worms, but now the depth was around 60m. Down towards the stern, there was a walkway that led out to both sides of the railing. Behind the stern, there were some more superstructures that I would look at the next time.

The bottom was covered with a lot of debris, which probably came from the superstructure and cabins as they rusted away. Going around to the bottom of the ship, one could see the propeller and rudder a little farther up. They were both in perfect condition, and it was a beautiful sight. With the way the wreck lay, the propeller stood completely free of the seafloor,

in open water. One could swim under it. But one thing caught my eye—the large rocks located on the rudder. How did they end up there?

The depth here was 75m, so dive time was passing by quickly. After seven minutes, my computer told me it would take 30 minutes to surface with a deco stop. But there were still things that we needed to look at on the way up.

If you follow the wreck upwards and up to the bow, just keep going in that direction. There is a lead line, which goes up to 6 to 8 metres, which you can follow right up to the stairs where you can also place your stage bottles. There is no need to strain the body to lift them all up at once after deco. Instead of making a free ascent, you

have the advantage of being able to swim along the edge. When you have 30 to 40 minutes of deco to pass, time goes a little faster when you have things that have been tossed to the

sea bottom to look at. I also managed to find a few nudibranchs.

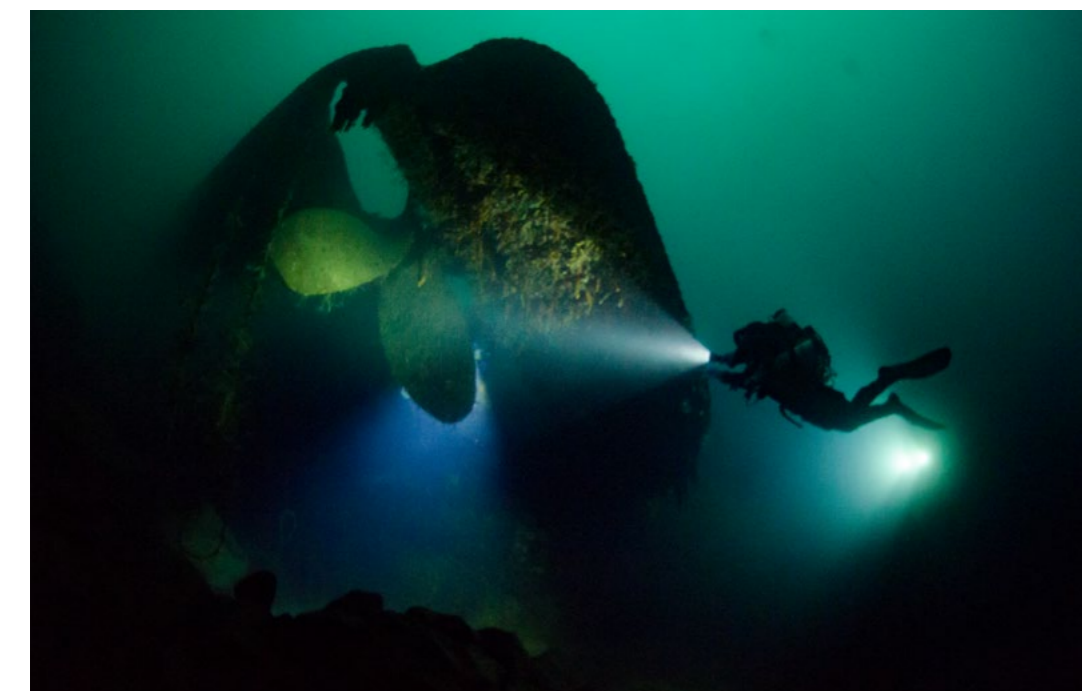
I previously dived the *Oldenburg* wreck back in 2010 on air, which limited the depth to 40m. This time, I was



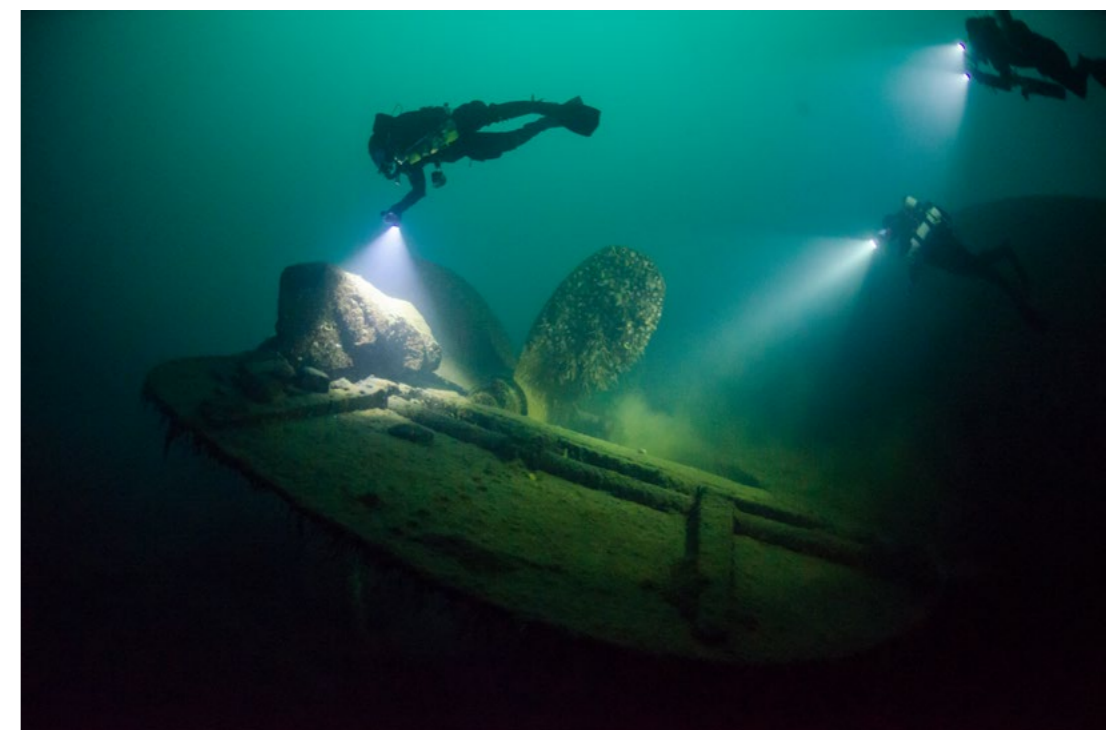
COURTESY OF MORTEN STRIDH

tank. From this section of the wreck and towards the bridge, I saw several gun turrets. The ship had been heavily armed with anti-aircraft guns. Unfortunately, there were no cannons





Diver at propeller (left); Marine growth on the superstructure (above left and right); How did rocks and a boulder end up on the rudder? (right)



on a rebreather which enabled me to see the whole wreck down to 75m. But there were many details that I need to look

closer at next time—for example, the engine room, the stern with its superstructures, the guns on the bottom, and the super-

structure at the wheelhouse, to name a few. Perhaps, I could also penetrate some of the holes in the wreck. The interior would make for a beautiful photo motif.

We got three dives on the *Oldenburg* on this trip, but we would definitely plan for more dives on the next trip. There is also the wreck of the steamship *Ingerseks* in Sognefjord (of almost the same size as *Oldenburg*), which I have not explored yet. But that is a story for another time...

I think it is impressive to find such a great wreck as the *Oldenburg* at a depth that can

be dived from the shore. When you read the stories about it, you too would want to dive it. ■

See wreck location on map here: dykkepedia.com/wiki/Oldenburg

Danish technical diver and author René B. Andersen is an award-winning underwater photographer who won the Photographer of the Year Award in 2019, in the wrecks category. He focuses primarily on technical wreck diving and recently published a book on wrecks in Scandinavia entitled, *Legends Beneath the Waves:*

Scandinavia, Volume 1 & 2. For more information, please visit: uvgalleri.dk

SOURCE: TOFT, M. (2003). HAVET TOK. SELJA FORLAG

Edited by Peter Symes

The Arado Ar 196 wreck in the bay of Kalathas, Crete



NIKOLAS GIANNOULAKIS

Wreck of Arado Ar 196 found in Greece

A mostly intact wreck of a WWII-era German floatplane, an Arado Ar 196, has been found off Crete by technical divers from Chania Diving Center.

Greek portal ScubaHellas reported that the German plane was located and identified by the technical diver and explorer Nikolas Giannoulakis, who also happens to be the owner of Chania Diving Center.

Giannoulakis had been informed about an “anomaly” on the

seabed and decided to investigate, which led to the discovery of the airplane that had lain on the seabed for some 80 years.

The airplane wreck, which is understood to be in quite a good condition, was found at a depth of 64m in the bay of Kalathas in northern Crete.

The Arado Ar 196 was a ship-board reconnaissance floatplane that was much

loved by its pilots, as it was found to handle well both in the air and on the water. Although it was no match for a fighter, it was considerably better than its Allied counterparts, and generally considered the best of its class. ■ SOURCE: SCUBAHELLAS



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Arado Ar 196 naval reconnaissance floatplane in the collection of the Bulgarian Air Force Museum at the airport in Plovdiv



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Lost wreck of Montevideo Maru found after 80 years

The Japanese transport ship *Montevideo Maru*, which was found at 4,000m in the South China Sea off the coast of the Philippines, was sunk during WWII on 1 July 1942 by a torpedo launched by the Salmon-class submarine *USS Sturgeon*, not knowing that the vessel was carrying prisoners of war and captured civilians.

It was Australia's worst maritime disaster, with 1,060 WWII prisoners lost, ranging from a boy of 15 to men in their 60s, who months earlier had been captured in the fall of Rabaul, then in the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea (now Papua New Guinea). People from many countries were on board, including 980 Australian troops and civilians. Nearly twice as many Australians perished in this one event than during the Vietnam War.

Discovery expedition

In April, a team of researchers, who set out to find the wreck in the South China Sea, discovered its resting place northwest of Luzon on the

twelfth day of the expedition, with the help of state-of-the-art technology, including an autonomous underwater vehicle. The *Montevideo Maru* was found at a depth deeper than the *Titanic*.

Verification that the wreck was indeed the *Montevideo Maru* was done over several days by a group of maritime archaeologists, conservators, research and operations specialists, and ex-naval officers.

The Australian prime minister, Anthony Albanese, said in a Twitter post that the discovery would bring closure to the families of those lost. "At long last, the resting place of the lost souls of the *Montevideo Maru* has been found," he wrote. "Among the 1,060 prisoners on board were 850 Australian service members – their lives cut short. We hope today's news brings a measure of comfort to loved ones who have kept a long vigil."

The expedition

The Sydney-based Silentworld Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to maritime archaeology and history, arranged the mission in collaboration with Dutch deep-sea



survey specialists Fugro. The project to find the wreck, which took five years to plan, was also supported by the Department of Defense.

Silentworld director John Mullen, a maritime history philanthropist and explorer, said that the finding of the wreck closed a "terrible chapter in Australian military and maritime history." He added, "Families waited years for news of their missing loved ones, before learning of the tragic outcome of the sinking. Some never fully came to accept that their loved ones were among the victims. Today, by finding the vessel, we hope to bring closure to the many families devastated by this terrible disaster."

Aboard the expedition ship when the wreck was discovered was Andrea Williams, an Australian whose grandfather and great uncle perished in the *Montevideo Maru* disaster. Williams is a founding member of the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society, which was formed in 2009 to represent the interests of descendants. For those connected with the disaster, she said the discovery was an "extraordinarily momentous day."

"Having had a grandfather and great-uncle as civilian internees on *Montevideo Maru* always meant the story was important to me, as it is to so many generations of families whose men perished," she said. "I could never understand why it

was not a more powerful part of our Australian WWII history."

Australian army chief Lieutenant General Simon Stuart remarked that soldiers, who had fought in defense of Rabaul, had met a tragic end on the *Montevideo Maru*. "Today we remember their service, and the loss of all those aboard, including the 20 Japanese guards and crew, the Norwegian sailors and the hundreds of civilians from many nations," he said.

Out of respect for families, the wreck will be left undisturbed. No human remains or artifacts will be removed from the site, which has been recorded for research purposes. ■

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN, WIKIPEDIA.ORG