



Diver on wreck of the WWI Italian scout cruiser *Rossarol*, which sank in 1918 at Lisignano in Croatia

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The waters of Istria in the Adriatic Sea are littered with ships from the First World War and one of the best known is that of the *Rossarol*, sunk on 16 November 1918. Divers from many parts of Europe have developed a project to remember the tragic episode and safeguard the integrity of the wreck.



Historical photo of Italian scout cruiser *Cesare Rossarol*



# Centenary of the **Rossarol Wreck** 1918 - 2018

## History

The Italian scout cruiser *Cesare Rossarol* was a Poerio-class ship built at the Gio. Ansaldo & C. shipyard in Sestri Ponente. Entered into service

on 1 August 1915, the *Rossarol* was actually a slender destroyer, 85m long and 8m wide. Her main armament comprised six cannons 102/45 and four torpedo launch tubes. With

a displacement of 1,235 tons at full load, the *Rossarol* was able to reach a maximum speed of about 32 knots.

During the First World War, the

*Rossarol* successfully carried out several missions in the Upper and Lower Adriatic, taking part in various combat actions, laying down mines and escorting armored units. Her tragic





Part of the commemorative events that took place on the centenary of the sinking of *Rossarol* was the placing of a memorial plaque on the wreck site, seen here being lowered to the dive team (right); Gun on the deck of *Rossarol* (far right); GUE divers prepare for dive on *Rossarol* (lower right); Diver on wreck of *Rossarol* (below)

loss came when the Great War was already over.

At 11:40 a.m. on 16 November 1918, a few days after the signing of the Armistice that sanctioned the end of the war, the *Rossarol* dropped her moorings at the port of Pula in Croatia in order to transport a Serbian officer to Rijeka who was supposed to convince the Serbian-Croatian irregular forces not to oppose the Italian occupation of the city.

After about an hour of navigating the sea, the ship hit a mine less than a mile from the coast, at the mouth of the harbor to the town of Lisignano, and the violent explosion broke the hull into two. According to witnesses at the time, the *Rossarol* sank quickly. The stern reared upright in the water before sinking, while the prow continued to drift



Rossarol



Valor Militare). Only 34 men managed to survive the sinking, rescued by other naval units.

Today, the wreck of the *Rossarol* rests on the sea floor at a depth of 49m. The stern, about 50m long, is tilted to one side, while the forward section is 336m away in an inverted position.

### The project

Since 2014, divers of Global Underwater Explorers (GUE), in collaboration with Maurizio Grbac of Krnica Dive Center, have been carrying out a historical, cultural and scientific project on this wreck. The project—which is sup-

ported by Santi Diving Equipment, Tecline Diving and K01—has several objectives, including bringing the historical event to light, studying the location of the wreck, and safeguarding its state of conservation.

The results of the project were presented on 4 September 2018, as part of a press event in Krnica that hosted representatives from Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway and Sweden. The event was organized by the Tourism Agency of Istria and the Altum Mare association of dive centers, in collaboration with the Croatian National Tourist Board, the Lisignano Tourist Office, the Diving Network Ltd and the Krnica Dive Center. Unveiled at the event was a new website dedicated to the shipwreck ([Rossarol.krnica.com](http://Rossarol.krnica.com)). Here, one can find historical information, underwater images and annual reports about the wreck

until it finally disappeared, swiftly swallowed by the waves.

In the sinking, 100 men perished, including seven officers, as well as 93 non-commissioned officers and sailors, including the captain and commander of the vessel, Ludovico De Filippi, who was born in 1872 in Turin and decorated with the Silver Medal for Military Valor (Medaglia d'Argento al







and the project, as well as 3D reconstruction models of the two parts of the wreck.

### Commemoration

Since the beginning of 2018, Istrian institutions have been keen to raise public awareness of the *Rossarol* affair, organizing a series of events marking the centenary of the shipwreck. In addition, there was no lack of commemorative dives to the wreck, one of which saw several GUE divers from the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic placing a plaque near the wreck.

The day of the dive to place the plaque began with a briefing held by project leader, Jeroen Veltrop, who illustrated the procedures for connecting the stainless-steel plate to a concrete base, which had been placed on the sea bottom at the wreck site the day before. At the end

of the Veltrop's briefing, the team—which included Peter Zaal, Berry van Leeuwen, Mathijs Geenen, Barend de Lange, Nicole Heuer, Joseph Chroust, Giovanni Grieco and Luca Palezza—performed the dive, with underwater photographic documentation of the event captured by Alex Dawson and Marcello Di Francesco.

The staff of Krnica Dive Center prepared the gas mixtures—trimix 21/35, EAN50 and oxygen—which were ideal for this dive to the stern area of the wreck at a maximum depth of 49m. As a diver, I know this wreck very well and feel connected to it in large part because I have been using it as a

training site for IANTD courses since 2008 and because I have documented the wreck site in the past. For more information (in Italian), see: <https://www.scubaportal.it/il-relitto-del-rossarol-da-prora-a-poppa-con-dpv.html>. ■



Rossarol monument at Liznjan in Croatia (above); Diver at canon on *Rossarol* wreck (top left)



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