

wreck rap



Divers on the wreck of the *Polynesian* in Malta

Text by Fatin Iesa
Photos courtesy of Dave Gratton,
University of Malta, Heritage Malta

Ranging from calm shore dives for beginner divers to technical diving on elusive, unmarked wreck sites, which can only be found via depth sounder—diving in Malta has it all. Just beyond Malta's dramatic underwater landscapes of strange rock formations, chimneys and caves, visitors can discover Malta's intriguing and piquant past. To aid visiting divers, a newly created Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit (UCHU) has been formed within the Heritage Malta agency under the country's cultural ministry to manage the deep historical wreck sites of Malta. The UCHU provides information regarding the history of the wrecks, how to appreciate them and what the proper etiquette is when visiting these war graves.

Currently rated as the world's tenth smallest and fifth most densely populated country, Malta is the biggest of the three islands of the Maltese Archipelago, which also includes Gozo and Comino islands. This archipelago sits in the middle of the

Mediterranean Sea, 93km south of Italy and 288km north of Africa, surrounded by warm clear waters and year-round temperate climate.

Due to its central location in the Mediterranean, this small island has his-

torically had great strategic importance as a naval base in the power struggles between Europe, Africa and the Middle East. In the 19th century, Malta was colonised by the British. During the Second World War, Malta became the headquar-

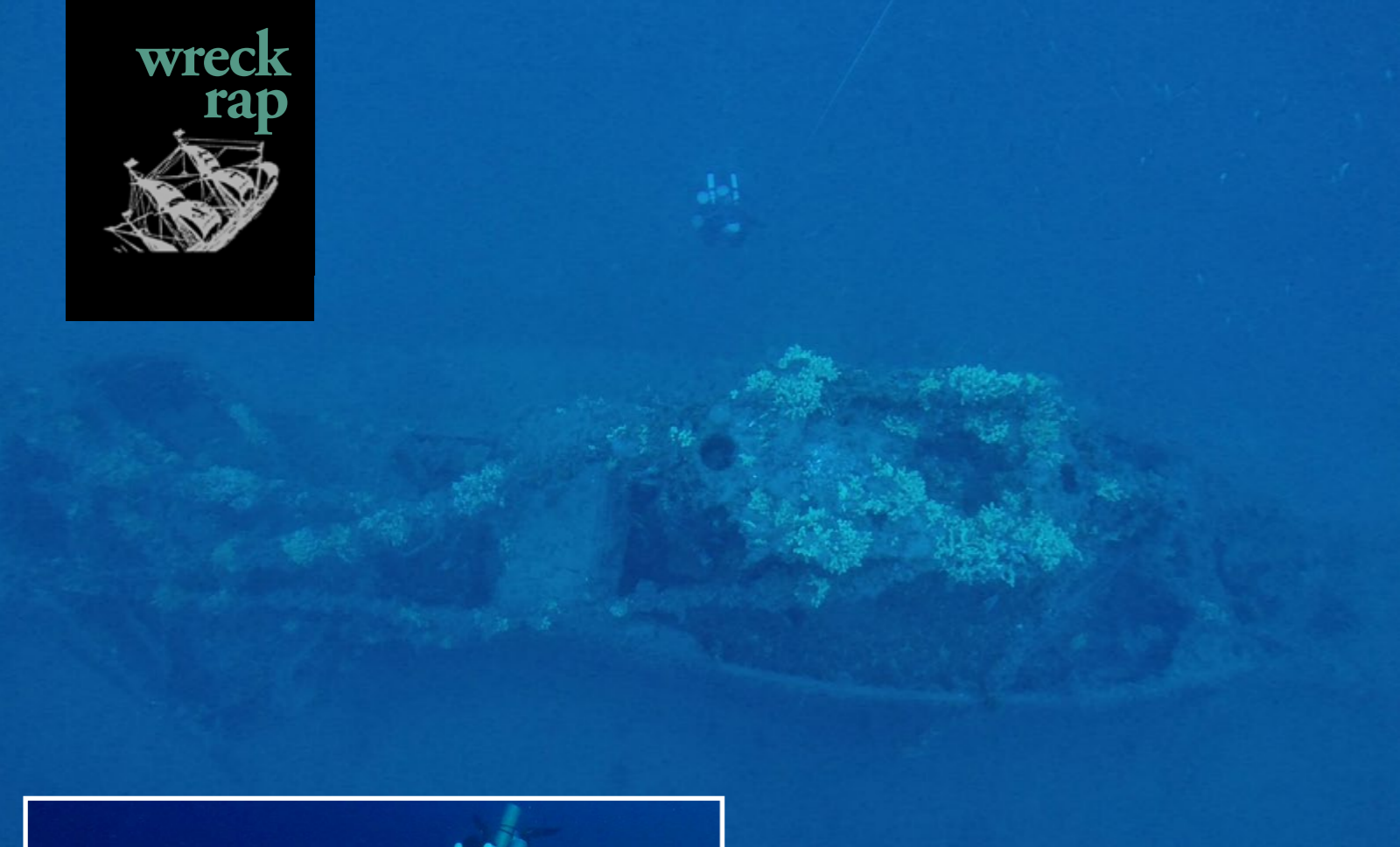
ters for the British Mediterranean Fleet where many ships and warplanes for the Allied powers were stationed.

Touched by the sands of time, many foreign influences have left their mark on Malta's ancient culture. As the Maltese

Malta's Deep-Water Wrecks

& Newly Created Underwater Heritage Unit





Diver on wreck of WWII Royal Navy submarine HMS *Olympus*

was formed under the national agency Heritage Malta, which is responsible for managing Malta's cultural heritage collections, sites and museums.

The UCHU entrusts 12 Maltese dive operators to book and conduct dive tours to the 12 historic dive sites through an online booking system. Regular spot checks of the shipwrecks are done by the UCHU to ensure the protection of the cultural sites. The booking system ensures that dive operators are aware of the basic respect and treatment due to wreck sites



government conducts long-term, systematic, underwater archaeological research off the coasts of the Maltese Islands, it has managed to map out a series of underwater cultural heritage sites. The chronological timeline of the discovered wrecks ranges from a 2,700-year-old Phoenician shipwreck to battleship and aircraft wreck sites from the Second World War.

With the great diversity of nations and cultures represented on the seabed off the Maltese Islands, comes great responsibility. In order to balance the accessibility of information about the wreck sites with the preservation and sanctity of the war graves, the UCHU



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Historical photo from 1941 of HMS *Olympus* resupplying in Malta

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THIS PAGE: Scenes from the wreck of ORP *Kujawiak* (L72)

HMS *Olympus*, sitting upright on the seabed, 115m below sea

Navigating through 50,000 naval mines deployed by Axis forces in Maltese waters, she was struck by one shortly after leaving port.

Her hatches lay open, indicating the crew's escape, as *Olympus* slowly sank to her watery grave. Disoriented by the darkness and misjudging the distance to the coast, just nine of the 98 men survived the seven-mile swim to shore. In honour of the fallen men, a memorial plaque has been placed at the base of the wreck.

ORP *Kujawiak* (L72)

The destroyer *Kujawiak* was given to



abundant, colourful fishes and other reef life. Aside from immersing oneself in the history of the wrecks while breathing compressed air and various gas mixtures, divers can enjoy the combination of sheer walls, caves, wrecks, plateaus, and the sandy and rocky seafloor of underwater Malta. Like Malta's vibrant nightlife, the dive sites are beautiful at night too, when the corals glow in wonderful

level. While her gun is still intact, aimed upwards, the vessel's posture echoes its failure to fire a shell, which otherwise could have saved the crew.

Protecting shipping convoys through the Mediterranean Sea, HMS *Olympus* was a WWII Royal Navy submarine designed for long-distance patrolling. On 8 May 1942, *Olympus* was charged with transporting the surviving crew members of stricken submarines back to England, who were returning to crew replacement submarines built in the United Kingdom.



Diver on WWII wreck of ORP *Kujawiak* (L72)

as well as informs them of new information pertaining to underwater cultural heritage sites. Heritage Malta will strive to open three to five new sites in the next two years.

Wreckage that resulted from horrendous acts of war are now teeming with life, from beautiful corals to

orange to stunning pink hues.

While there are wreck dives in Malta for all levels of recreational divers, here is a look at a few of the deep-water wreck sites for technical divers.

HMS *Olympus*

Seven miles off the port of Valletta, lies

DAN

DOWN HERE, MISTAKES CAN BE COSTLY.

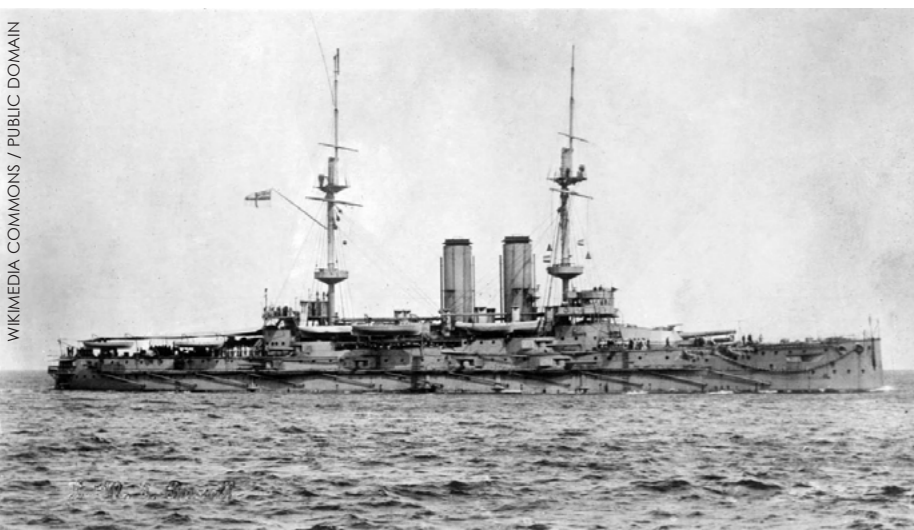
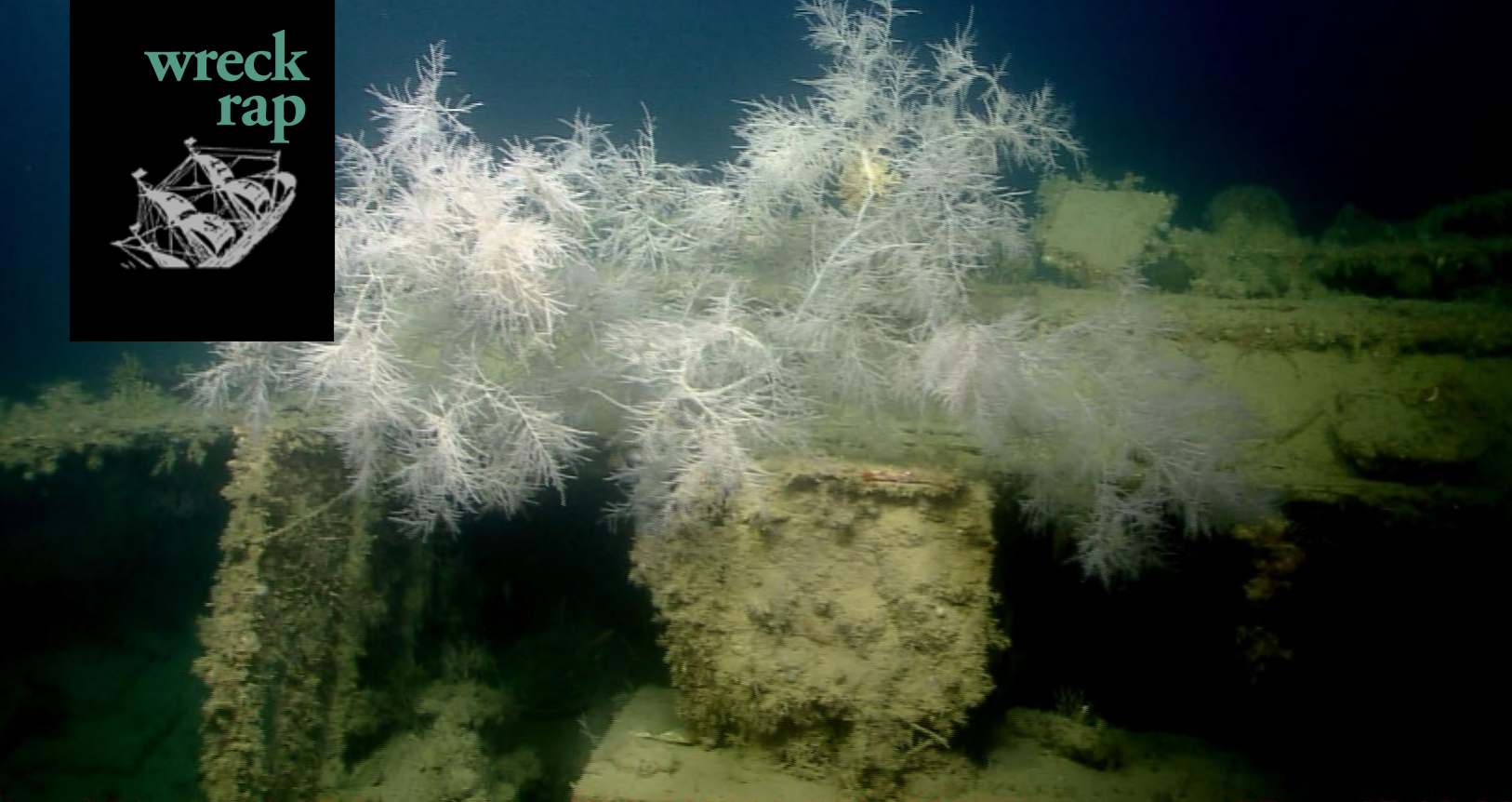
THE COST OF A DIVE ACCIDENT CAN EASILY SURPASS \$50,000.

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Scenes from the wreck (above and right) of the WWI Royal Navy battleship HMS *Russell* (left)

planes. After successfully shooting down four Axis planes, *Kujawiak* attempted a dangerous rescue mission while

British Royal Navy. With a speed of 19 knots, she was one of the fastest warships of her time.

In April 1916, *Russell* was on her way to return to Malta for a fortnight to recuperate and get some minor repairs done, giving her crew some time on land. The Grand Harbour was closed due to boom defence, in which small auxiliary ships laid and maintained steel anti-torpedo nets around the harbour. While manoeuvring outside the harbour, she struck by two naval mines laid by German mine-laying submarine U-73. A fire broke out in the aft of the ship, which led to an explosion by one of the turrets, forcing the vessel to list perilously. It took 20 minutes before *Russell* capsized and sank, giving most of the crew enough time to escape.

Currently located about 6km east of Fort St. Elmo at a depth of around 115m, the *Russell* wreck site is a boat dive for technical divers on trimix. With its stern section missing, the 132m-long wreck

the Polish Navy by the British Royal Navy in May 1941. Similar to HMS *Olympus*, *Kujawiak* was struck by a mine off the coast of Valletta a month after *Olympus*.

Polish Navy crewmen were part of an armed convoy known as Operation Harpoon. In the middle of WWII, Malta fell short of supplies. Allied powers put together a relief convoy with supplies to Malta from Gibraltar on 12 June 1942. Two days after leaving Gibraltar, the Harpoon convoy was attacked, and *Kujawiak* intercepted strikes by Italian submarines and torpedo

entering Malta's Grand Harbour. She went to rescue another ship in the convoy but ended up hitting a mine herself.

Lying at a depth of 97m, *Kujawiak* is fairly well-preserved except for her stern, which was badly damaged when she hit the seafloor. The ship's bells were recovered in 2017 and are on display at the Maritime Museum of Malta.

HMS *Russell*

HMS *Russell* was a Duncan-class, pre-Deadnought battleship launched in February 1901 for the



Divers on the wreck of the Junkers Ju 88, a German WWII Luftwaffe twin-engine multirole combat aircraft

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lies completely upside down on the sandy seafloor.

Junkers Ju 88

Due to Malta's importance as a port for the British in WWII, the strategy of the Axis forces was to bomb the harbours, towns and Allied convoys bringing supplies to Malta in order to destroy the country and starve its citizens. Between 1940 and 1943, the Siege of Malta saw the destruction of many

ships and planes of both the Allied and Axis forces. Junkers Ju 88 was a German twin-engine, all-metal bomber, one of the many pawns of the Axis forces in WWII.

Divers who are interested in air-plane wrecks will find the Ju 88 wreck in relatively good condition,

with her broken tail a short distance away and the cockpit still retaining its forward-facing machine gun. Resting at 57m, it is one of the shallower wreck sites outside Salina Bay.

Fairey Swordfish

The Fairey Swordfish was a British single-engine biplane torpedo bomber, about 11m in length with a 14m wingspan. In 1941, Fairey Swordfish biplanes were utilised to cripple the

shipping vessels of Axis forces.

This particular plane experienced engine failure in April 1934, forcing the craft into an early underwater burial. Luckily, off-duty men from the Royal Air Force's air-sea rescue services came to the rescue of the pilot.

Deep-water wreck diving

"It is envisaged that the Maltese Islands will become a market leader in the field of deep-water wreck diving," said Owen Bonnici, Maltese Minister for Justice, Culture and Local Government, in a recent press release announcing the launch of the UCHU.

These sunken heritage wreck sites are more than 40m deep, requiring technical diving certification to be dived and explored. With wreck remains at depths ranging from 55m to 115m, Malta offers some of the best deep-water wreck diving in the region.

Usually at these depths, the type of flora and fauna present is secondary in interest to the wrecks themselves. The sheer size of destruction in the

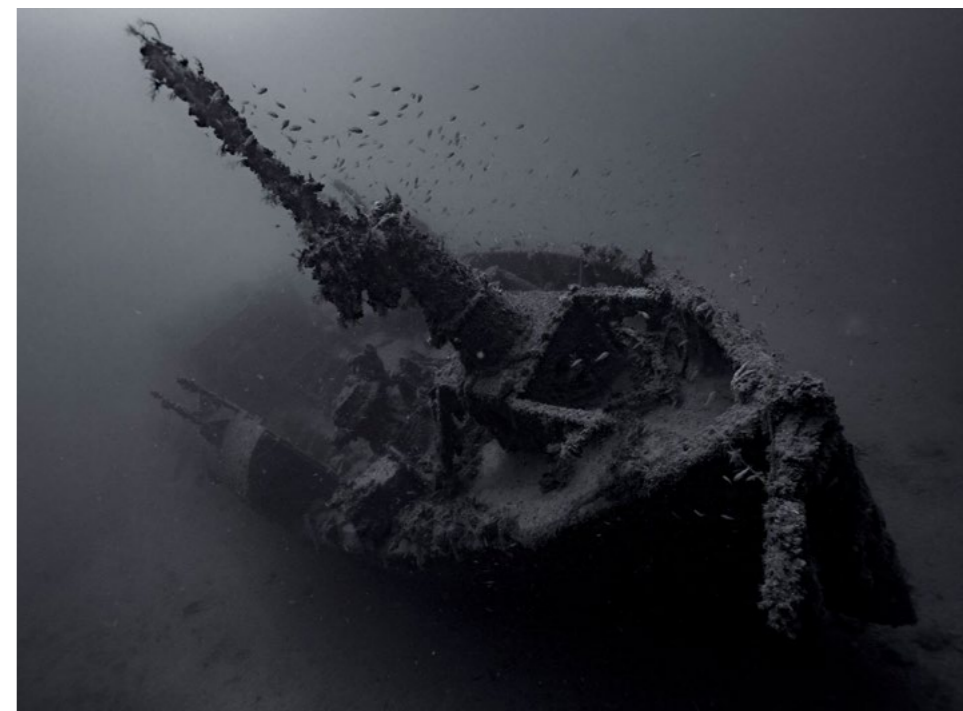
THIS PAGE: Scenes from the wreck of the Junkers Ju 88; Historical photo of a Junker Ju 88 aircraft (center)





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Diver on wreck of the *Polyne-
sian* (above); Wreck of the
Trusty Star (right); Diver on wreck
of a WWII Fairy Swordfish (top
left); Historical photo of Fairy
Swordfish, a British WWII torpedo
bomber (left); Overview of the
Fairy Swordfish wreck (far left)



aftermath of the world wars, com-
bined with the rich history behind
each wreck site is overwhelming.

To aid divers in properly exploring
the historical wreck sites, Heritage
Malta will provide dive schools and

clubs with promotional and educa-
tional materials such as waterproof
cards about each wreck site. Besides
adhering to strict rules and regula-
tions for diving the wrecks and main-
taining the integrity of the wreck sites,
dive operators are also responsible
for the health and diving qualifica-
tions of the divers diving the sites.

Apart from mapping the wreck sites
and making the underwater wrecks
public, the UCHU is initiating an out-
reach programme to inform the pub-
lic about the importance of Malta's
underwater cultural heritage. ■

For more information, please visit:
visitmalta.com/en/home.

*Based in Singapore, Fatin Iesa is a
science educator and dive writer,
certified as a PADI divemaster. She
says she must have been reincarnat-
ed from a dugong, since she craves
diving every other day. Always
searching underwater for a pretty
octopus in crevices, being surround-
ed by bubbles and blue is her bliss.*

REFERENCES:
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VISITMALTA.COM
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WRECKSITE.EU

WW2DB.COM



ICONSELL DE MALLORCA/IBEAM

Well-preserved Roman shipwreck holding nearly 100 amphoras found off Mallorca

The treasure trove of relics was first discovered in July 2019 in the waters of S'Arenal beach in Palma, according to an announcement from the Council of Majorca.

The vessel—which experts have dated back to around 1,700 years ago—sank mere feet off of the coast of what is today Can Pastilla Beach. According to the archaeologists, the seabed near the beach was dotted with at least 93 amphora, traditional jugs with two handles and a narrow neck used by the Greeks and Romans—many of which remained intact. The wreck is around 10m (33ft) long and five metres (16ft) wide. The merchant ship is thought to have been carrying its wares between Mallorca and the Spanish mainland. Given the excellent preservation of its fragile cargo experts think the shipwreck was likely not the result of a storm.

In a press conference, archaeologist

Sebastian Munar of the Balearic Institute of Maritime Archaeology Studies said that the amphorae were perfectly conserved in the ship's hold.

Judging by the ship's route, the age of the wreck and some of the inscriptions on the amphora, the archaeologists suspect it was carrying olive oil, wine and a fermented fish gut sauce called garum—a soy sauce-like condiment that was hugely popular in ancient times.

However, researchers will not be able to open the amphoras to check until they have finished preservation work that will stop the salt in the sea water cracking the jars. ■ SOURCE: BALEARIC INSTITUTE OF STUDIES IN MARITIME ARCHEOLOGY



USS *Eagle 2*, an identical sister ship of *Eagle 56*

Last US warship to be sunk by a German sub during WWII located off the coast of Maine

At noon on 23 April 1945, USS *Eagle PE-56* exploded amidships, and broke into two pieces 3mi (4.8km) off Cape Elizabeth, Maine. The sinking of the USS *Eagle* was originally blamed on a boiler explosion. But in 2001, the US Navy determined it had been sunk by a German submarine, and the ruling was changed to reflect the sinking as a deliberate act of war, perpetrated by German submarine U-853, a U-boat belonging to Nazi Germany's Kriegsmarine.

The World War I-era patrol boat split in half, then slipped beneath the surface of the North Atlantic. When it sank, 49 of its 62 crew were killed, and the others had to be rescued from the ocean by a passing Navy boat.

Despite the Navy's effort to clarify the circumstances surrounding the sinking, the *Eagle 56* remained a mystery. The ship had sunk relatively close to shore, but efforts to locate the wreck were futile for decades. No one could find the *Eagle 56*, a small patrol ship that had come so close to making it back home.

The ship's wreckage was located in June 2018, and visited by a civilian dive team later, the same month. It lies five miles (8.0km) off the coast of Maine at a depth of 91m (300ft). A video taken by the divers shows that USS *Eagle 56's* boilers are intact, proving once and for all that they did not explode.

Business Insider spoke to two crew members—Jeff Goodreau and Donald Ferrara—about their discovery. “The *Eagle 56* was always the shipwreck to find. That was the great ghost of New England. A lot of people looked for it. Nobody could find it,” Goodreau stated

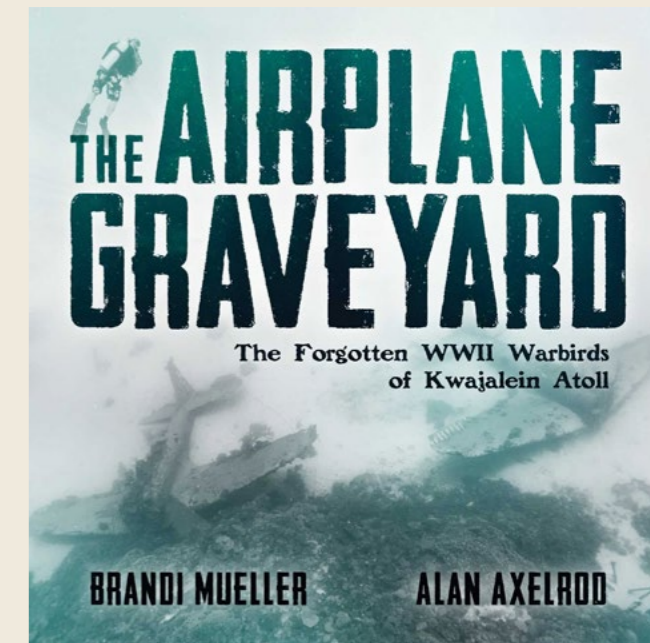
But the *Eagle 56* was never going to be an easy find. Goodreau described the ocean floor north of Cape Cod as a labyrinth of rocky mountains and canyons. The *Eagle 56* was a “fairly small” boat. And, though the crew did not know this at the time, it was lodged in a trench.

“It's kind of like the equivalent of dropping a soda can into a canyon and putting on a blindfold and going and finding it, because you can't just look down and see it,” Goodreau said. “Visibility's 10 feet. It's pitch black.”

Even worse, the crew's expensive magnetometer ended up being somewhat of a bust, thanks to the undersea terrain. “It turns out that the rocks off of Maine aren't only big, they're full of iron,” Goodreau said.

The exploration of the wreck will be featured in the three-part series “The Hunt for Eagle-56,” which premieres on the Smithsonian Channel on September 22.

■ SOURCES: WIKIPEDIA, BUSINESS INSIDER



Never before published in book form, see extraordinary images of the forgotten American WWII airplanes resting on the bottom of the Kwajalein Atoll lagoon, from award-winning underwater photographer Brandi Mueller. Available on: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



More Wreck Beers Brewing

Resurrected, centuries-old beers discovered on shipwrecks by divers have been in the news this year. Let's look at a few of these beers and their backstories...



JAMIE ADAMS VIA AP

New York, USA – Salvaged from the SS *Oregon*, a luxury liner that sank in 1886, a 131-year-old ale has been crafted from yeast found in bottles at the wreck site. The steamship was making its way from Liverpool to New York, when it struck a schooner and sank near Fire Island. From 2015 to 2017, divers led by Jamie Adams of Saint James Brewery in Long Island discovered over 20 bottles with corks intact in the first-class dining room of the ship. With the help of a microbiologist, Adams was able to recreate the beer from yeast, which is thought to have been used in a beer called *King's Ale*, produced over a century ago by Bass Brewers in England. The new ale crafted from the resurrected yeast was named *Deep Ascent*. ■

SOURCE: ABC3340, AP NEWS



ANTONIN HALAS / VVT

Aland, Finland – Divers salvaged five bottles of 170-year-old beer from an early 19th century shipwreck in the Aland archipelago of Finland in 2010. The discovery was one of the world's oldest preserved beers found. Now, after analysis of the yeast in the beer conducted by VVT Technical Research Centre in Espoo, an Åland Islands micro-brewery, Stallhagen, has been able to make an authentic replica of the beer, which is called *Stallhagen Historic Beer 1842*, by using the micro-organisms in the beer found on the wreck. According to Mats Ekholm, master brewer at Stallhagen, it is a Belgian wild-yeast beer. Because wild yeasts have a tendency to spread, they have to be processed in a strictly controlled environment. So, the historic beer was produced at the University of Leuven's beer laboratory in Belgium. ■

SOURCE: HELSINKI TIMES, NEWS18, VVT



JAMES SQUIRE

Tasmania, Australia – A 220-year-old bottle of beer has been recovered from a shipwreck dating back to 1797, located off Preservation Island in Tasmania. To reach Sydney, the 17 survivors of the merchant ship *Sydney Cove*, which sank due to heavy seas and extreme weather, trekked a grueling 600km on foot along the southeastern coastline across dunes, cliffs and rivers. In the end, only three survivors made it. In collaboration with the Australian Wine Research Institute and Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery of Launceston, a brewing team from James Squire, one of the oldest breweries in Australia, have extracted yeast from the recovered ale to craft a new beer, which they have called *The Wreck Survivors' Ale*. ■

SOURCE: THEAUREVIEW, WIKIPEDIA



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The barrels found on the wreck of the *Gribshunden* (*Griffen*) may have been used in a similar way to those depicted in this detail from an illustration in *Treatise on the Vices*, which was originally published in Genoa, Italy, in the late 14th century. It shows a cellarer among barrels, handing a glass to drinkers in a chamber above him.

Ronneby, Sweden – A 500-year-old Danish beer may have been discovered by divers during the excavation of the *Gribshunden* (or *Griffen*), the flagship of King John of Denmark, which sank in 1495 off the coast of southeastern Sweden, at Ronneby. The ship, which was on its way to negotiations with Swedish separatist forces when it met its demise, is considered one of the world's best-preserved 15th century vessels, similar to the kind that Christopher Columbus sailed when he discovered America. Sten Sture the Elder, who led the Swedish separatist forces to victory at the Battle of Brunkeberg in 1471, established himself as ruler of Sweden.

In collaboration with the Blekinge County Administrative Board and Ronneby Municipality, the excavation and investigation of the wreck is being done by a team of researchers from Lund University,

Södertörn University and the Blekinge Museum, as well as several other international scientists. Researchers found coins, animal bones, tool fragments and a small ring on the wreck, as well as several barrels containing liquid, with holes for aeration and bottling. In those days, water was not considered safe to drink, so sailors drank beer. It is very likely that the barrels found on the wreck contain beer, according to Professor Johan Rönnby at Södertörn University.

"We're taking sediment samples now and hoping we're going to find DNA evidence of hops," Brendan Foley, Rönnby's fellow researcher from Lund University, told The Local. "What we're doing is getting a look at not just what the men on the ship were drinking but what King John was taking to Kalmar to impress Sten Sture the Elder." ■

SOURCE: SPUTNIKNEWS.COM