



wreck rap

Diver on LST 349 at Punta Papa on Ponza Island

Text and photos by Carlo Ravenna

The sinking of USS LST 349, which was heading to Naples from Anzio, Italy, occurred in February 1944. It happened during a severe storm, in which turbulent seas pushed the ship against the cliffs at Punta Papa on Ponza Island. Even though the people of Ponza made a great effort in the rescue operations, the death toll was heavy.



WWII Wreck

LST 349

At Ponza, Italy



The tank landing ship (also called LST or Landing Ship, Tank) used by the United States during WWII, had a flat bottom, a length of about 97m and a width of around 15m. The LST 349 was launched in Virginia on

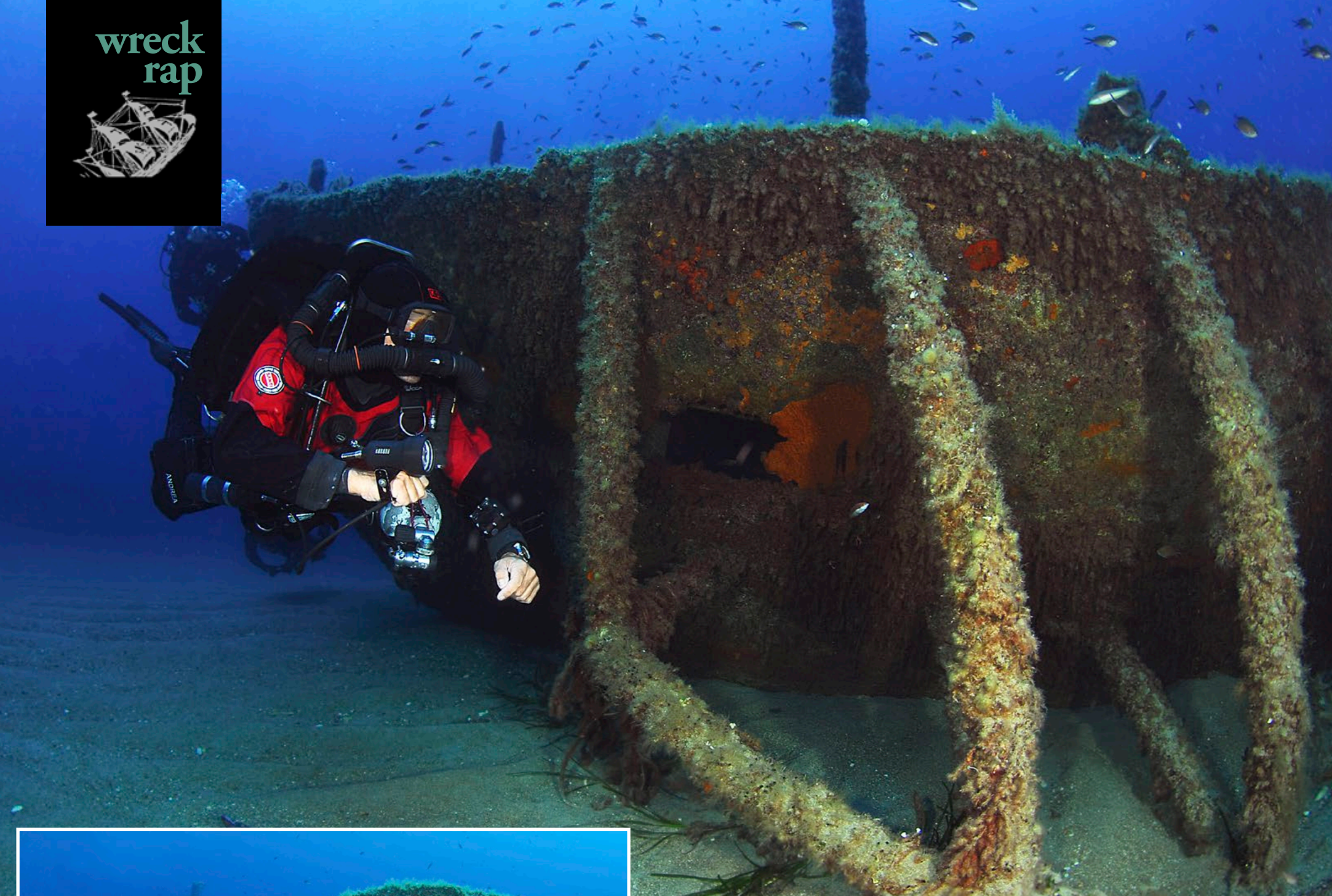
7 February 1943 and was built, based on a revision of a British model, for logistical support of military operations in the Second World War for embarking and disembarking troops, military vehicles and supplies

on coastal landings without harbor docks or piers.

On its last voyage, the fury of the sea tore the ship into two parts, which sank to the sandy sea floor in an upright position. Today, the

bow of the ship rests at 26m, below Punta Papa, facing the northwest. The stern is located inside the cove, about 400m from the bow, and rests in a north-south orientation.

wreck
rap



PONZA
DIVING
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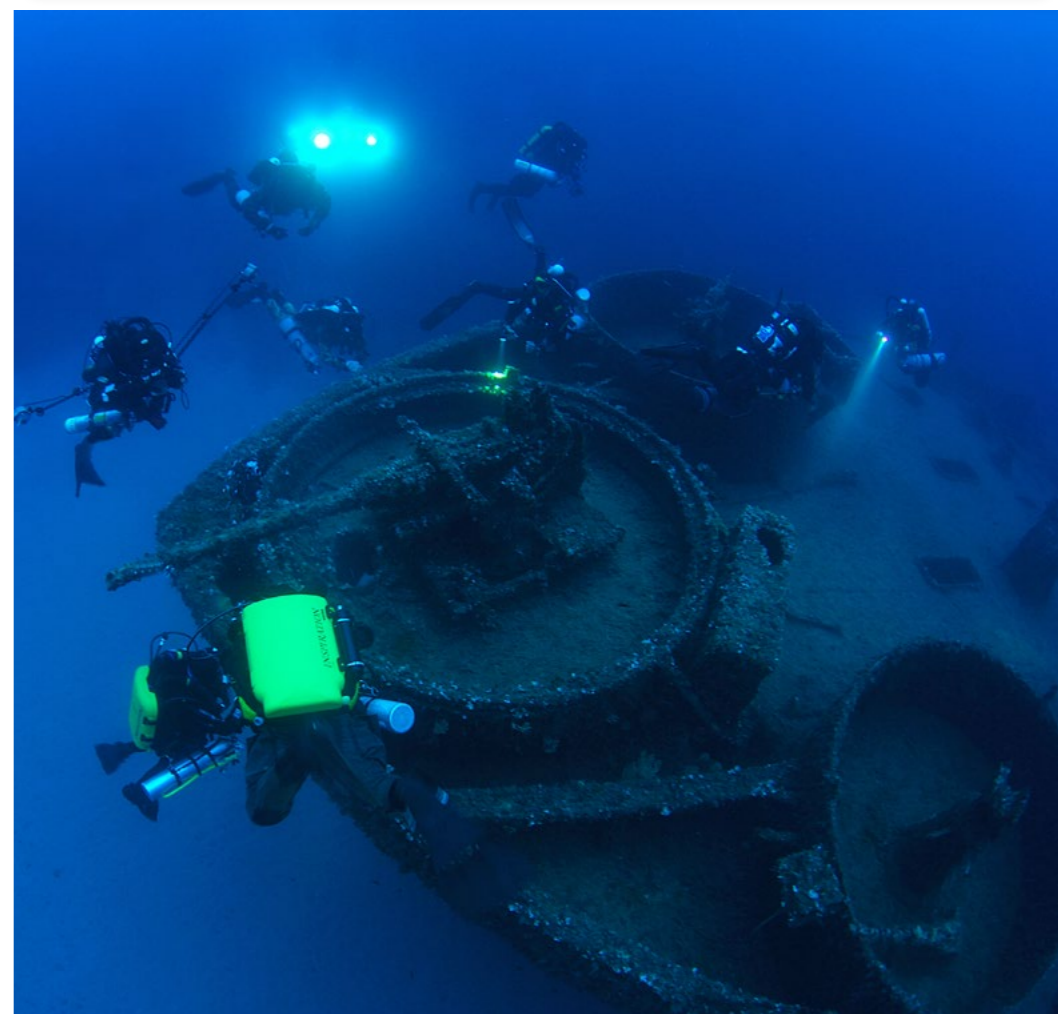
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Diver at stern of the wreck of LST 349, located off Punta Papa on Ponza Island, Italy

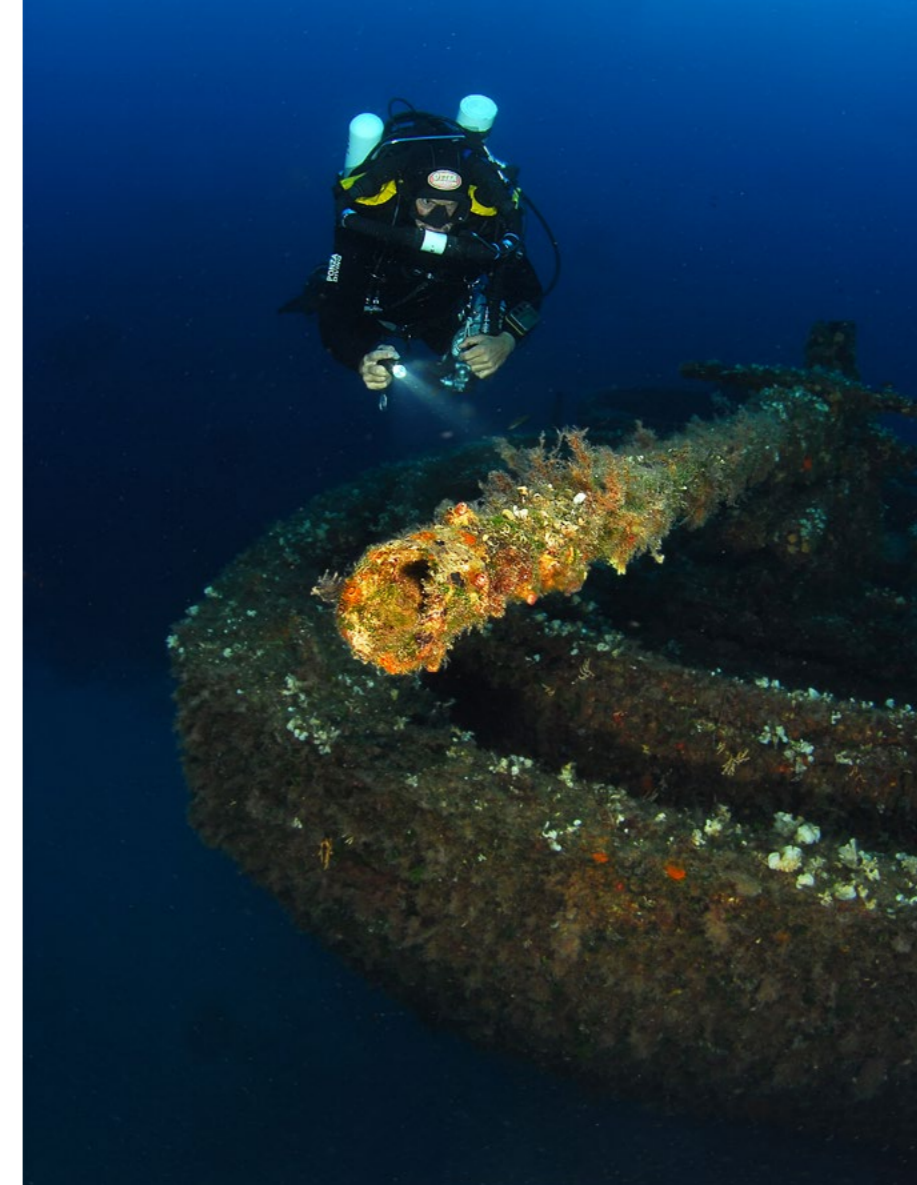
Diving the wreck

To explore the ship in detail, it takes at least two dives: one on the bow and one on the stern. The front section, most frequented by divers, is certainly the best part of the wreck. One just has to descend a few meters to get an overview of the wreck and see, in crystal clear water, the two machine guns and the cannons of the ship. The winch chain and other structures on the wreck are still in a good state of preservation.

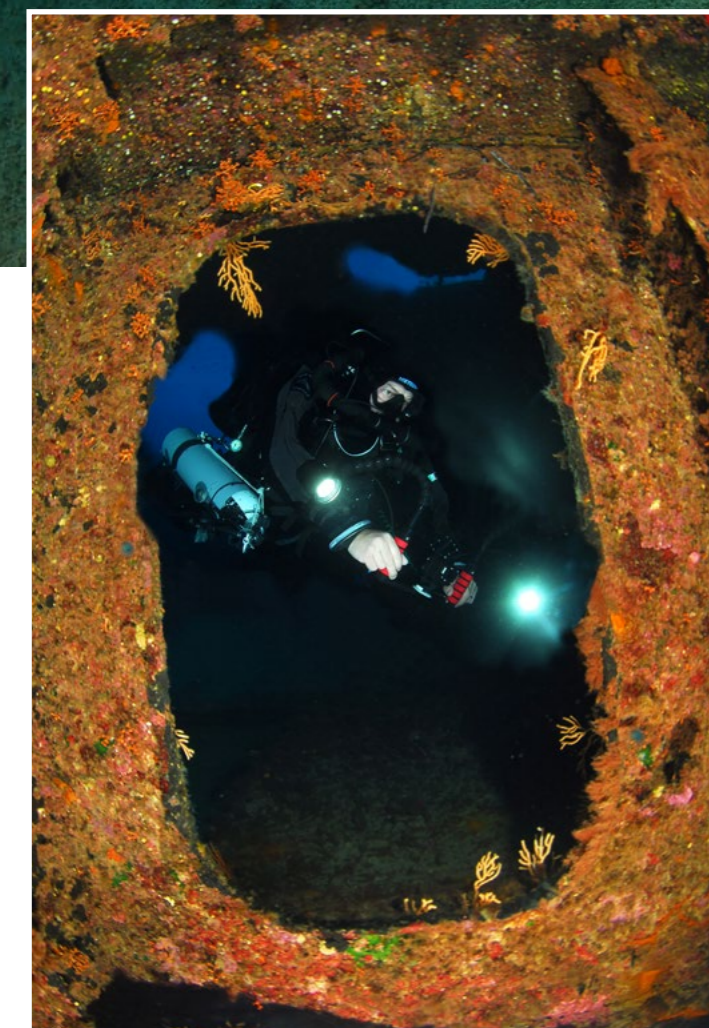
However, the tailgate is no longer in place, which, when lowered, allowed the landing of soldiers and vehicles on the beach, so it is recommended that divers descend to the bottom to explore the garage first, finding entrances to different cargo holds along the way, meter after meter.

The walls of LST 349 are completely covered with a thick colony of yellow gorgonians, which benefit from the nutrient-rich current that is often channeled inside the wreck. Among the





THIS PAGE:
Scenes from
the wreck of LST
349, the stern of
which rests at
20m off Punta
Papa on Ponza
Island, Italy;
Diver at gun on
deck of LST 349
(left)



various fishes at the wreck site, you can easily find curious groupers that will follow the movements of divers.

Tips for photographers

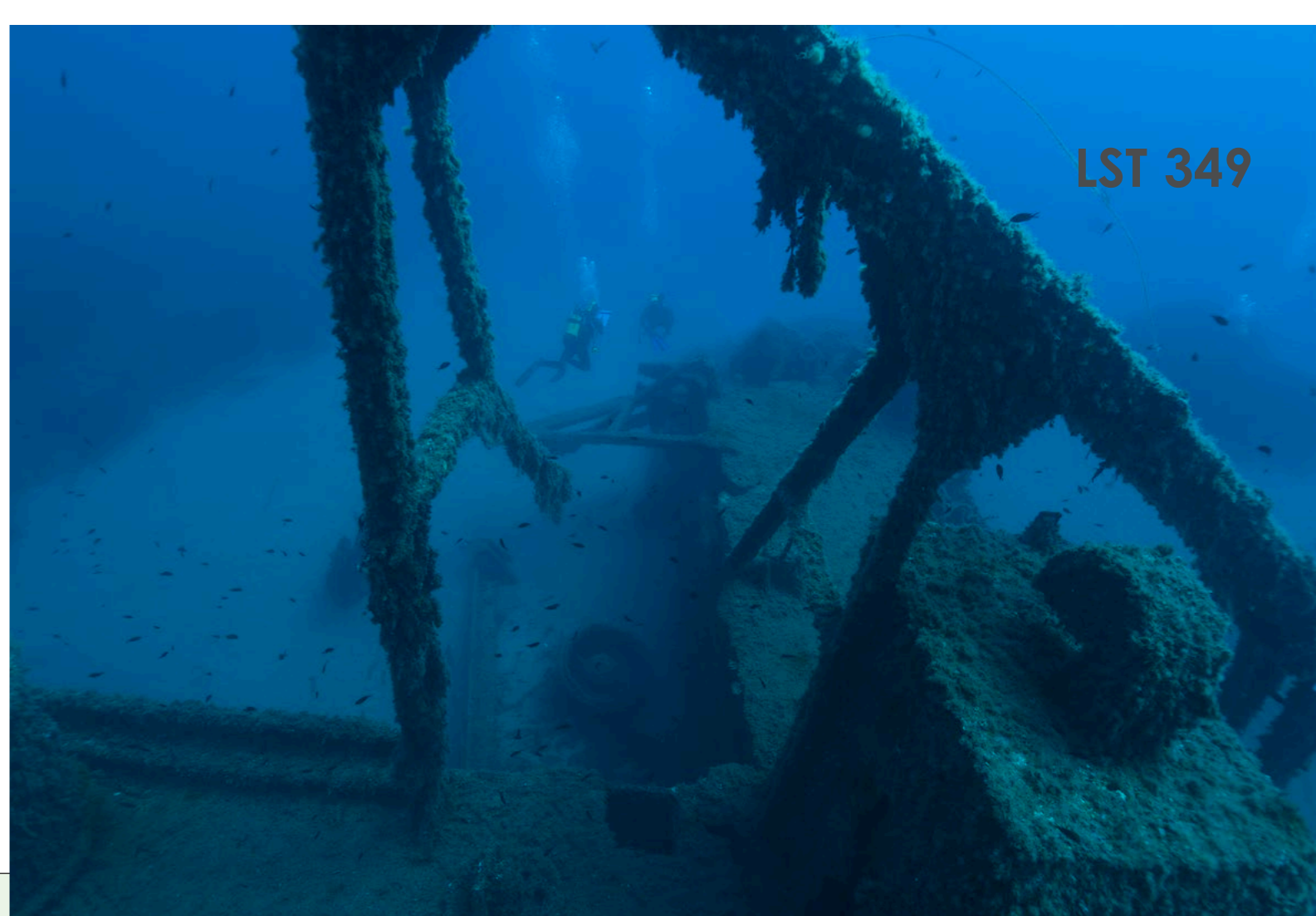
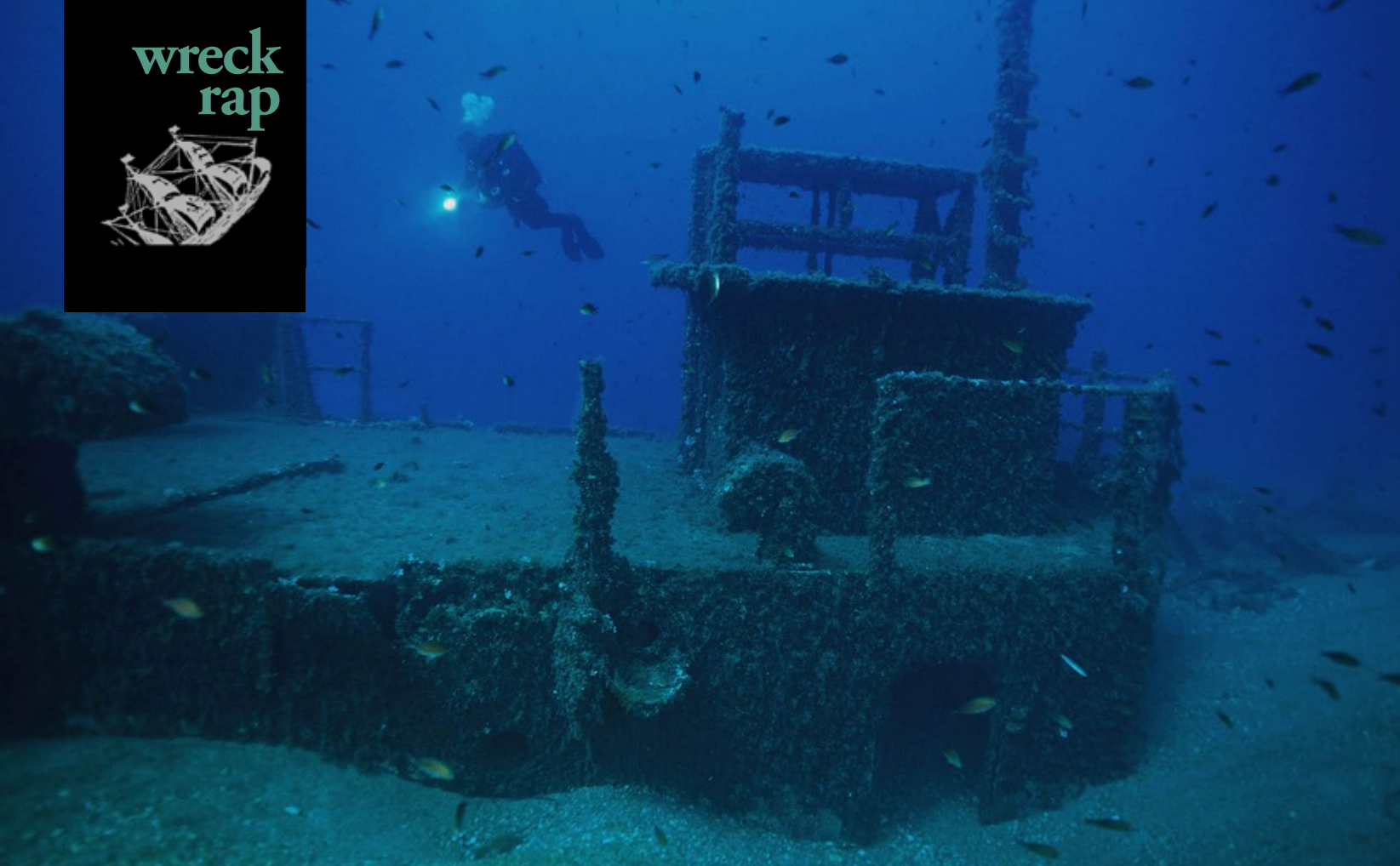
To get beautiful photographs of the wreck, it is recommended that underwater photographers reverse their visit and start from the bridge. Otherwise, bubbles expelled by other divers in the group will pass through the many cracks of the hull on their way to the surface, spoiling most of the shots.

On the return ascent, given the proximity of the dive boat to Punta Papa, it might be better to keep the cliff on one's left-hand side until 12m, where you will reach a beautiful cavern with various openings through which light is filtered. The stern rests at 20m, on a white, sandy sea floor,

which makes the underwater environment very bright. Here, one will find a control cabin, machine rooms, a piece of a propeller blade, wheel and engines. Finally, divers ascend along the cliff wall, at the end of this multi-level dive. ■

Carlo Ravenna is an Italian underwater photographer based in Rome, who has been diving for over 25 years. A love of nature and imagery led Ravenna, a former architect, into a career in nature photography and shooting for television. He is the author of several Italian underwater guide books, including Mediterraneo Vita Sommersa (published by Calderini), Ventotene sott'acqua and Il Giglio sott'acqua (published by Guastadisegni). For more information, please visit: CarloRavenna.it.





WWII SIGNAL CORPS PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS / PUBLIC DOMAIN

Historical photo taken in 1944 during WWII showing the tanks of an armored regiment disembarking from an LST in the harbor of Anzio, Italy, as reinforcements to the US armed forces on the beachhead

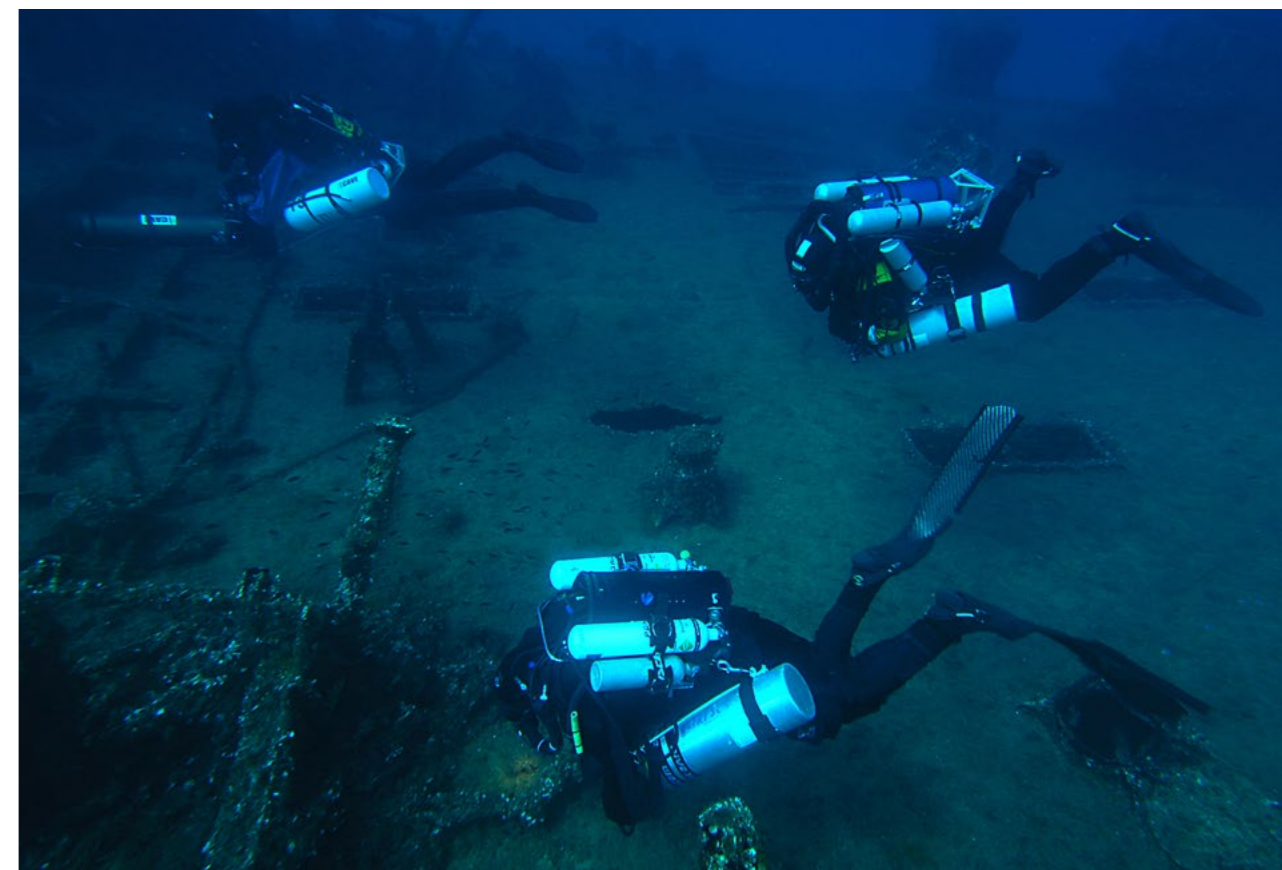
WWII HISTORY OF LSTs

The LST (also known as “landing ship, tank” or “tank landing ship”) was integral to the fighting forces during World War II, transporting tanks, cargo and troops directly to the battlefield. They were unique in that their flat keels allowed the ships to remain upright after beaching, without the need for docks or piers. Their twin propellers and rudders were specially protected from grounding.

The ship saw its combat debut in the Solomon Islands in June 1943, and also served in the Pacific War and the European Theatre. When on a mission in the battlefield, upon reaching its destination, a large door would open up onto dry land and a ramp would be deployed, facilitating the unloading of the troops, cargo and vehicles.

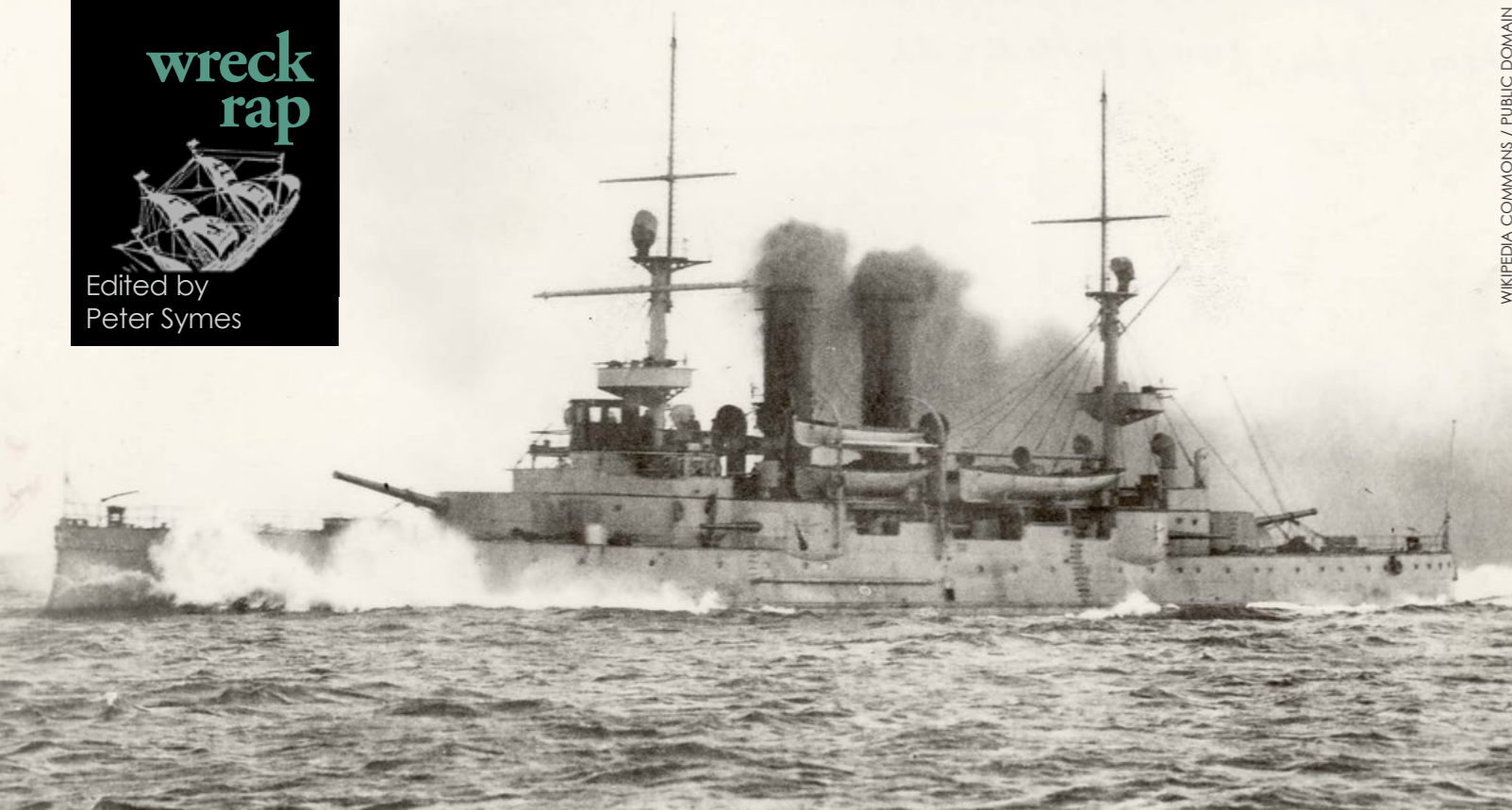
The LSTs proved to be versatile. Some were converted to become landing craft repair ships and hospital ships, while others were fitted with flight decks to launch small observation aircraft.

After World War II, many LSTs were demilitarized and converted into ferries, small freighters and dredges, while others were used in training or as target practice. ■



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the wreck of LST 349, located at Punta Papa on Ponza, Italy



Battleship *Norge* seen from port side

Legendary Norwegian WWII warship and war grave looted by divers

HNoMS *Norge* was a coastal defense ship in the Royal Norwegian Navy that was torpedoed and sunk by German destroyers in Narvik Harbor during the attack on Norway on 9 April 1940. Today, the sunken warship, which is considered part of the Norway's cultural heritage, is being subjected to plundering.

The Eidsvold class was a class of coastal defense ships, two of which were built for the Royal Norwegian Navy in 1899. The class consisted of two ships, HNoMS *Eidsvold* and HNoMS *Norge*. Locally, they were referred to as

panserskip. The Eidsvold class was armored to withstand battle with ships of a similar class, but the underwater armor and internal partitioning were not designed to withstand torpedo hits, which caused both ships' demise.

The remains of *Norge* rest at a depth of about 20m (66ft), in the middle of Narvik Harbor. Partly salvaged in situ, it is considered a war memorial and diving on or near the wreck was banned between 1999 and 2014. Shortly after the ban was lifted in order to attract more divers, artifacts started disappearing from the wreck, the NRK (the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) reported in August.

Ban

Officials from Nordland county told NRK that, among other artifacts, the engine order telegraph

and speaking tube have been removed from the wreck. In consultation with the Tromsø Museum, which is the administrative authority for the wreck, Narvik Municipality and Riksantikvaren (Norway's Directorate for Cultural Heritage), the county will now meet to discuss how they can prevent further looting and destruction of the shipwreck.

Sinking of *Norge*

The German attack on Norway came as a surprise, and the forces in Narvik were quite unprepared for the attack. In the morning mist, the armored warship *Eidsvold*—the sistership to *Norge*, which was anchored outside Framnesodden—discovered that foreign naval vessels were on their way to Narvik's harbor. Even being a 40-year-old warship at the time,

the armament of the *Eidsvold* was a big threat to the much smaller German destroyer, *Wilhelm Heidkamp*, which stopped a few ship's lengths away.

Asked to surrender

It must have seemed very strange for the commander of the *Eidsvold* to be requested to surrender to a German destroyer deep into a Norwegian fjord. As the *Eidsvold* prepared to open fire, the *Wilhelm Heidkamp* fired torpedoes, which sank the *Eidsvold* in just a few seconds. The German ships could, thereafter, sail into the harbor basin, partly hidden in a strong bliz-

zard. On board the *Norge*, it was clear that something was amiss. The ship then slipped its moorings. When the foreign warships were discovered in the harbor, the *Norge* immediately opened fire. Again, it went terribly wrong for the pride of the Norwegian navy. *Norge* was hit by a torpedo from the German destroyer *Anton Schmitt* and capsized, sinking in just two minutes.

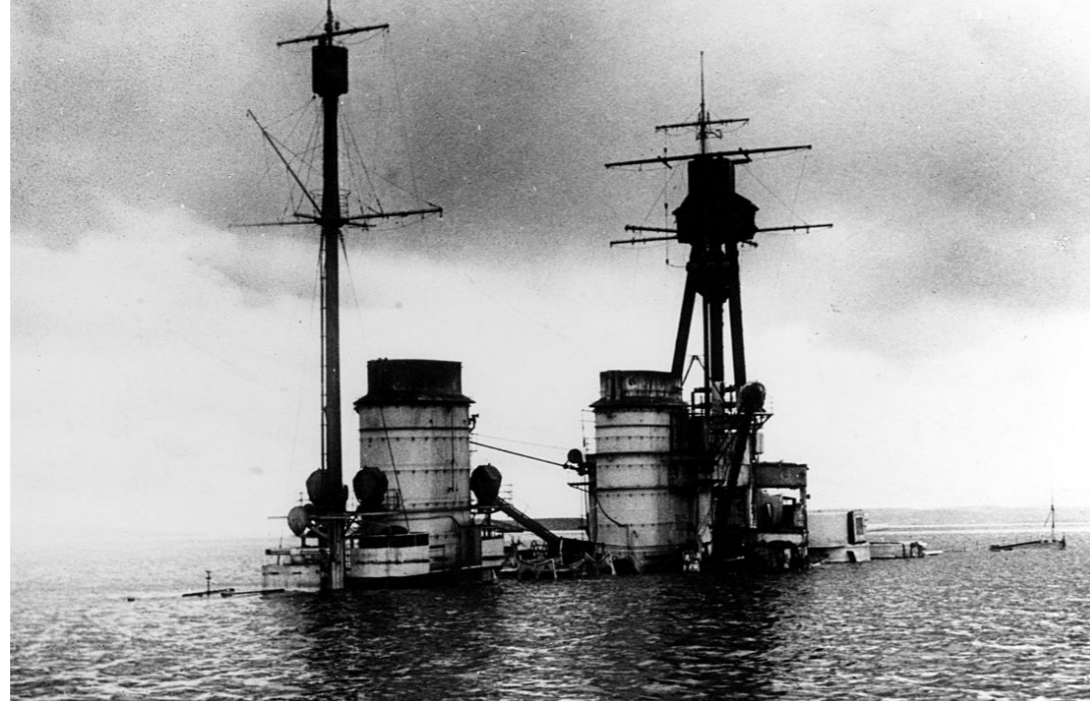
Total chaos

Out in the harbor basin, all was total chaos. The merchant ships launched lifeboats into the water, and thereby rescued a number of

survivors from *Eidsvold* and *Norge*. The captain of the German iron-ore cargo ship *Bockenheim* thought that it was British forces that were attacking, as three torpedoes hit the ship. He therefore ordered the ship to be beached and blown up. In the space of just a short time, Narvik Harbor was under German control. All the merchant ships that weren't German were immediately put under German command, and the guns on the British cargo ships were demounted, to be used as land-based guns. ■

SOURCE: NORWEGIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION (NRK)

Historical photo of HNoMS *Norge*



Scuttling of the German Fleet at Scapa Flow—the upperworks of the German battlecruiser SMS *Hindenburg* above the water at Scapa Flow.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM / PUBLIC DOMAIN

WWI warships at the bottom of Scapa Flow being mapped

Shipwrecks of the WWI German High Seas Fleet and the Scapa Flow war graves of HMS *Hampshire*, HMS *Vanguard* and HMS *Royal Oak*, which are located in a body of water sheltered by five of the Orkney Islands, are being surveyed.

Using a suite of geophysical equipment, ROV and diver survey to collect data that will accurately record the wrecks as they sit on the sea floor today, Orkney Research Center for Archaeology is conducting surveys in the area to map 10 naval shipwrecks at the bottom of Scapa Flow, the main base of the British Grand Fleet since World War I. The data collected will be used to continue to monitor, protect, conserve and promote these impressive shipwrecks.

Scuttling

The High Seas Fleet was the battle fleet of the German Imperial Navy in World War I. Following the signing

of the Armistice on 11 November 1918 at Compiègne, France, which effectively ended World War I, the surface fleet was to sail to the Firth of Forth and surrender to British admiral David Beatty. They would then be led to Scapa Flow and interned, pending the outcome of the peace negotiations. On 21 June 1919, Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter gave the order to scuttle the 74 ships of the High Seas Fleet located in Scapa Flow to prevent the ships from being seized under the Treaty of Versailles.

Not all salvaged

Nearly 52 wrecks were salvaged—only seven of the vessels, and some parts of others, remain underwater. The British Admiralty wrote off the sunken ships as complete losses and sold the rights to entrepreneur Ernest Cox for GB£250. He spent the next year recovering almost all of the smaller destroyers. Most of the steel was sold as scrap. One use, which could not have been predicted in 1919, was late 20th century precision scientific instruments, including those used in satellites.

The British ships in the study include the HMS *Vanguard* and HMS *Hampshire*, which sank during World War I, and HMS *Royal Oak*, which sank during World War II. The project has brought together universities, commercial companies and government bodies, including Historic Environment Scotland, Marine Scotland, Ulster University, Heriot-Watt University, University of Dundee and private company Seatronics.

Andrew Fulton, from Historic Environment Scotland, said, "We are pleased to see this next stage of survey work on the underwater wartime remains of Scapa Flow. The results will help update existing records of the wrecks, guide their management and contribute to the commemoration of momentous events in wartime history."

It is planned that this project will contribute to the centenary commemoration of the scuttling of the German High Seas Fleet in 2019. ■
SOURCE: ORKNEY RESEARCH CENTRE FOR ARCHAEOLOGY

Long lost WWII warship USS *Indianapolis* located

The USS *Indianapolis* was destroyed on 30 July 1945 when, somewhere in the Philippine Sea between Guam and Leyte, it was hit by a torpedo from a Japanese submarine. On 18 August 2017, a search team financed by Paul Allen located the wreckage of the sunken cruiser in the Philippine Sea lying at a depth of approximately 5,500m (18,000ft).

The *Indianapolis* sank in 15 minutes on 30 July 1945, in the final days of World War II. The ship was on its way to the Philippines when torpedoes from a Japanese submarine struck the ship. Of the 1,196 men on board, just 316 were rescued—the largest loss of life at sea

in the history of the US Navy. Nearly 300 people went down with the ship, and of the 900 who abandoned ship, only 317 would survive after four to five days in the water suffering from exposure, dehydration, drowning and shark attacks. It took the Navy four days to realize that the vessel was missing.

Location a mystery

The ship's rapid sinking and the lack of a distress call meant the ship's location had long been a mystery. The shipwreck's location had eluded researchers for decades. The coordinates keyed out in an SOS signal were forgotten by surviving radio operators and were not received by Navy ships or shore stations, the Navy command said. The ship's mission records and logs were lost in the wreck.

Researchers got a break last year, however, when Richard Hulver, a historian with the Naval History and Heritage

Command, identified a naval landing craft that had recorded a sighting of the *Indianapolis* hours before it was sunk. The position was west of where it was presumed to be lying. The search team was able to develop a new estimated position, although it still covered 600 square miles of open ocean.

Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, whose crew discovered the vessel on 18 August, called the shipwreck a "significant discovery", considering the depth of the water.

Delivered first A-bomb

The ship is well-known for its final, secret mission. The *Indianapolis* had just completed a top-secret mission to deliver components of the atomic bomb "Little Boy" as well as enriched uranium fuel for its nuclear reaction to the island of Tinian. The bomb was later dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. ■



US NAVY / PUBLIC DOMAIN

US Navy heavy cruiser USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) underway, 27 September 1939

*To be able to honor the brave men of the USS *Indianapolis* and their families through the discovery of a ship that played such a significant role in ending World War II is truly humbling.*
— Paul Allen

