

Diver at the large right-hand boiler, which is tilted to starboard, located at the back of the *John G. McCullough* wreck

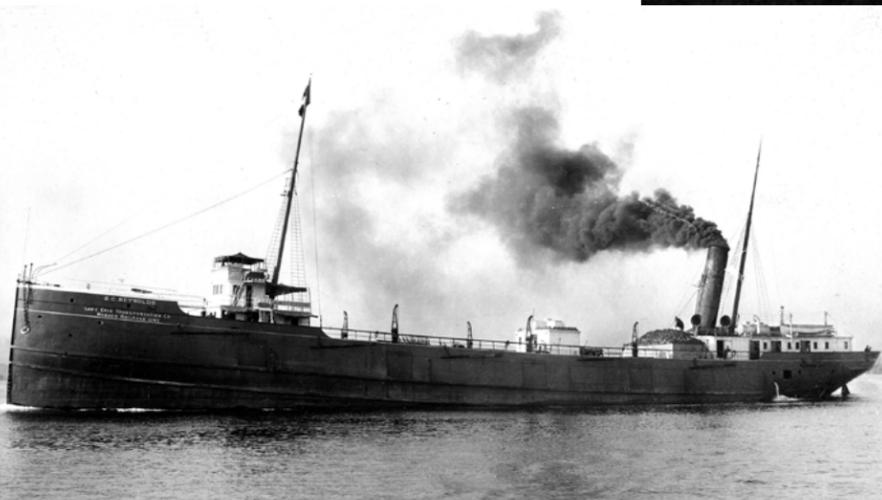
Text and photos by Pascal Henaff
Drawing by Herve Marsaud
Translation by Loïck Penhoat

How did a late 19th-century ship from the Great Lakes region of the United States end up shipwrecked off the coast of France, in the Bay of Biscay? Pascal Henaff has the story and shares impressions from a dive on the wreck.



John G. McCullough

Late 19th-Century Great Lakes Steamer in the Bay of Biscay



The *John G. McCullough*, when it was called *S.C. Reynolds*. Source: Historical Collections of the Great Lakes, Bowling Green State University

The *John G. McCullough* was built in 1890 by the Union Dry Dock Company in Buffalo, New York, USA, on behalf of the Erie Railroad Lake Line company. At 1885 gross tons, the ship measured 77.72m long and 12.22m wide.

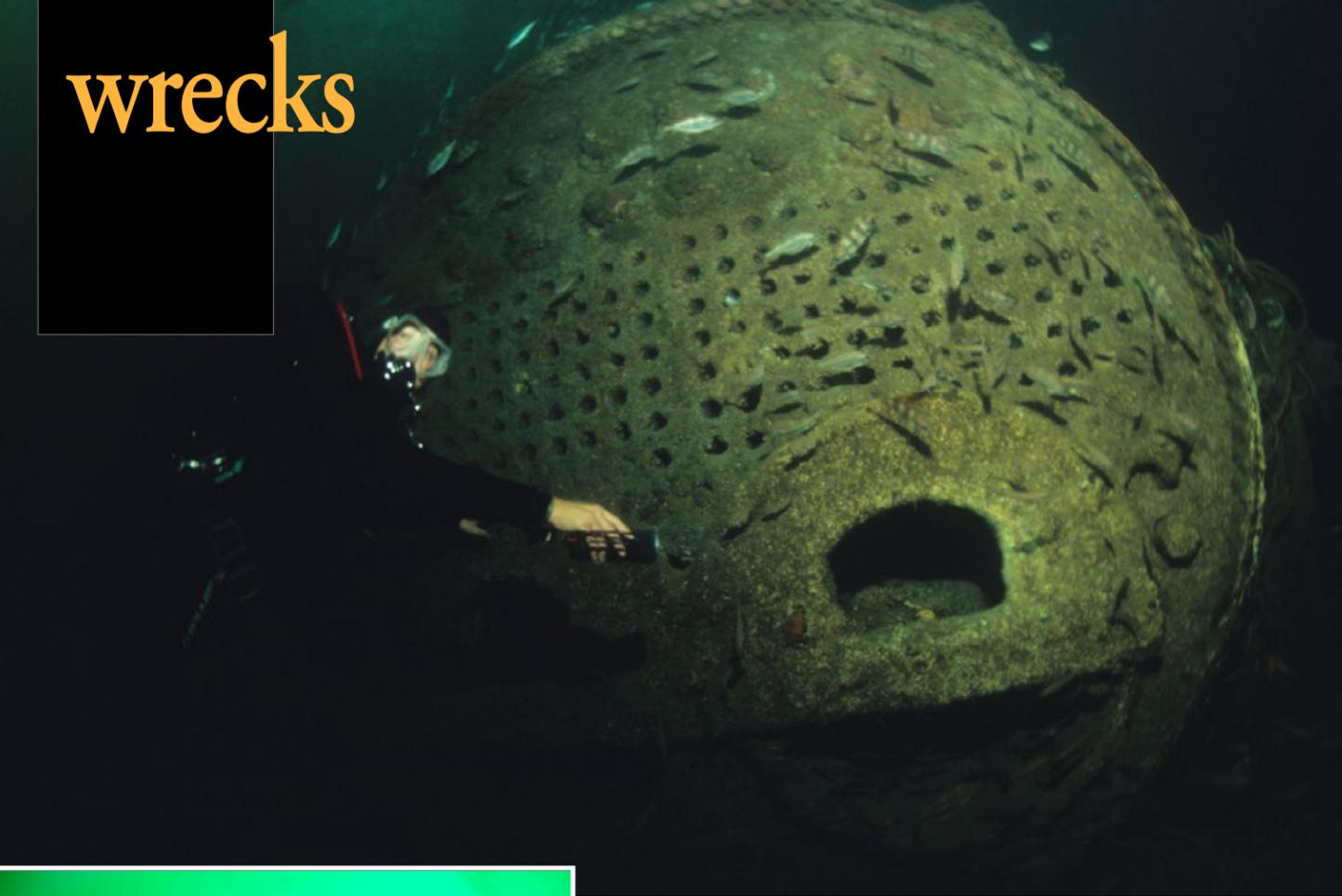
Two boilers fed a triple expansion machine, located at the rear of the boat. The remaining space on the ship was used for freight.

Launched under the name of *S.C. Reynolds*, it was renamed *John Griffith McCullough* in 1902

in honour of the company's president. McCullough was born on 16 September 1835 in Newark. After graduating from the University of Delaware in 1855, he worked as a lawyer in Pennsylvania, California and

Vermont. He eventually settled in New York, to chair the steering committee of the Erie Railroad Company in 1888, and then became governor of Vermont in 1902. He died in May 1915.

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History

In the beginning, the *John G. McCullough* performed its function on the Great Lakes (a historical photo shows it sailing down the St. Clair River). Then in 1915, it was sent back to the shipbuilding company in Buffalo, and on to Davie Shipbuilding, a shipbuilding and repairing company in Quebec. The vessel had to be modified for another use, different from the one it had had on the Great Lakes. During this same time, the United States went to war, just after the *Lusitania* was torpedoed. The *John G. McCullough* was then requisitioned by the US Army Transport Service (ATS).

In early May 1915, the vessel was under the command of Frederick Hastswell. It left London filled with ballast and sailed to Belgium. There, it picked up freight (truck axles and



wheels, cement bags, etc) for the US Army. It then headed towards Rochefort, armed with a 90mm gun. The vessel had a total crew of 32, including four Americans, 26 Brits, one Dane, and one German. The US Army Brittany Patrol Division instructed the ship to navigate around the Raz de

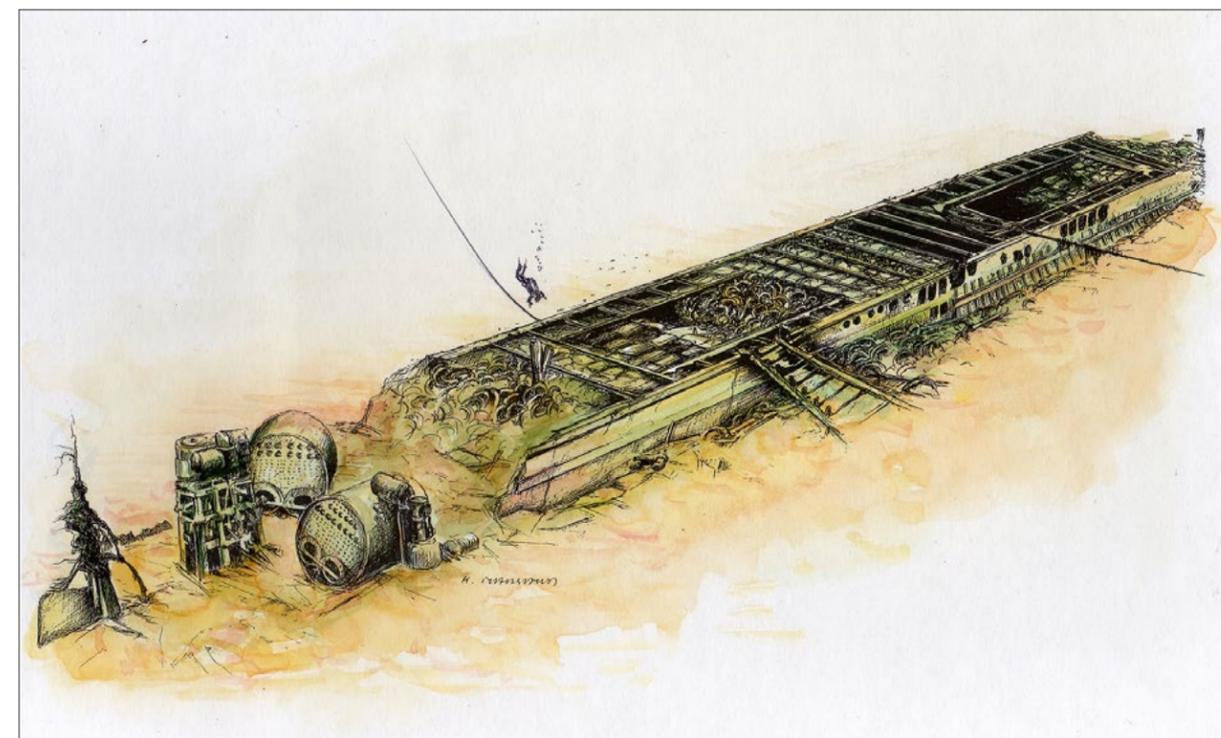


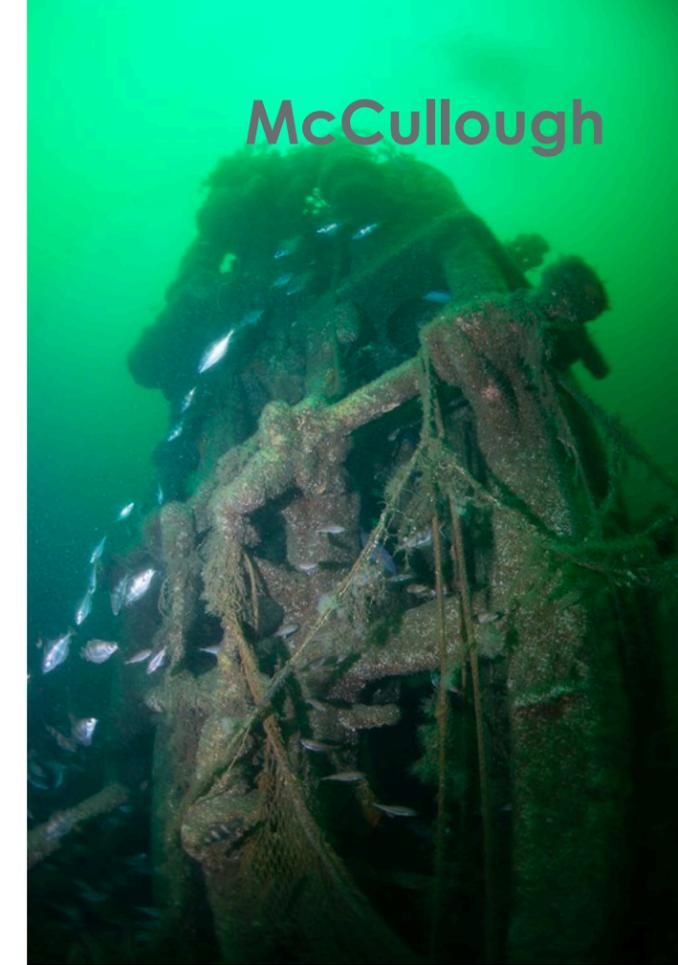
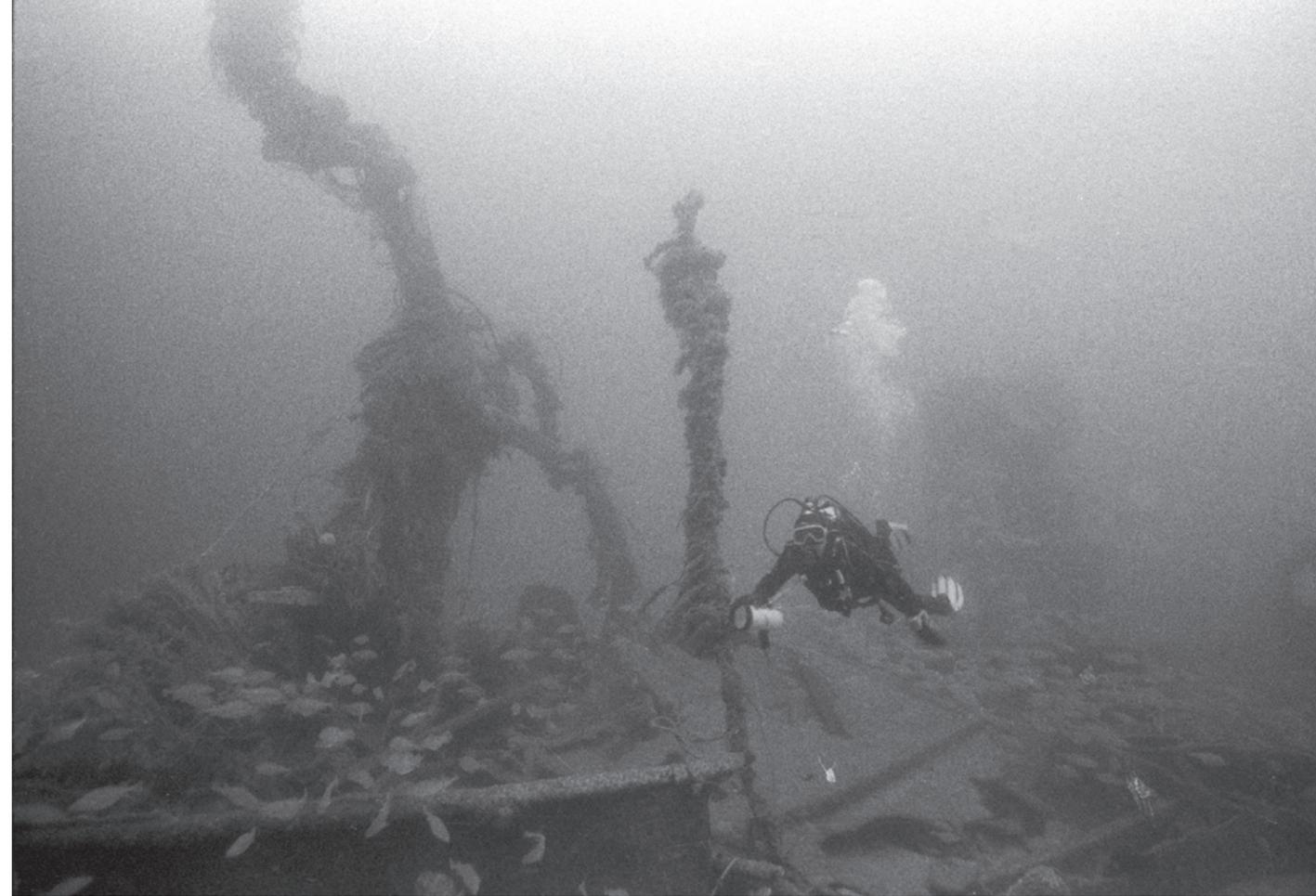
Illustration by Herve Marsaud of the actual wreck, as seen on a dive (above); Diver on starboard side of *John G. McCullough* (centre and top right); Diver at the right-hand boiler that is tilted to starboard side (top left)

Diver under the ever-impressive steam engine mount

HERVE MARSAUD

wrecks

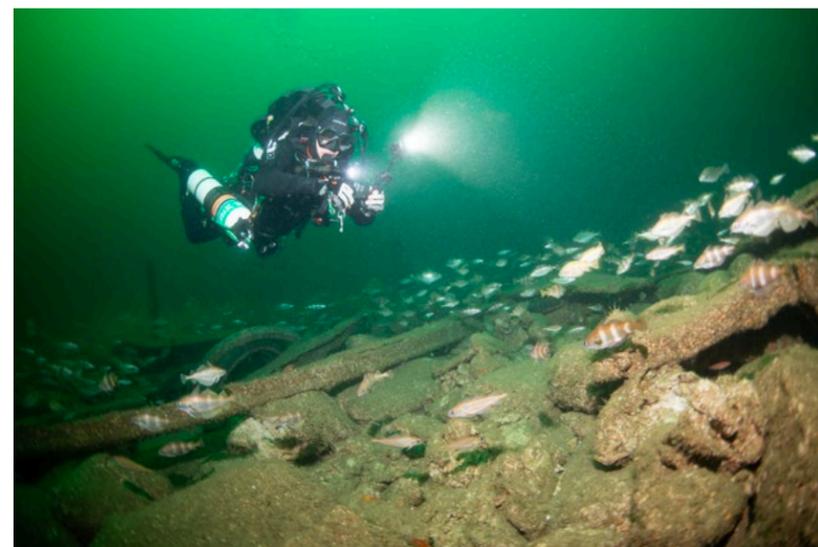
Part of ship's cargo consisted of bags of cement, which has now solidified, thereby preserving the structure of the vessel (below); Diver at post of the stern (right); The steam engine that protrudes from the bottom by at least three to four metres (far right)



Starboard view from bottom of cargo hold overflowing with truck wheels (right); Diver enjoys wandering above the wreck (centre)

Sein, and travel down the coast along the Glénan Archipelago (Archipel des Glénans) and to the island of Groix (Île-de-Groix). The ship then had to sail away from the Quiberon Peninsula in order to later reach an escort vessel, which was bound for the island of Aix (Île-d'Aix).

On 18 May 1918 at 4:45 a.m., the ship was situated to the south of the island of Yeu (Île d'Yeu); visibility was between one and two miles. Without zigzagging, the ship headed south-east, at a speed of 6.5 knots. The American patrol boat *Emiline*, which was escorting the *J.G. McCullough* to port, was one mile behind it. Navigation lights on the ship had been turned off, and all other lights had been obscured. Suddenly, a violent explosion



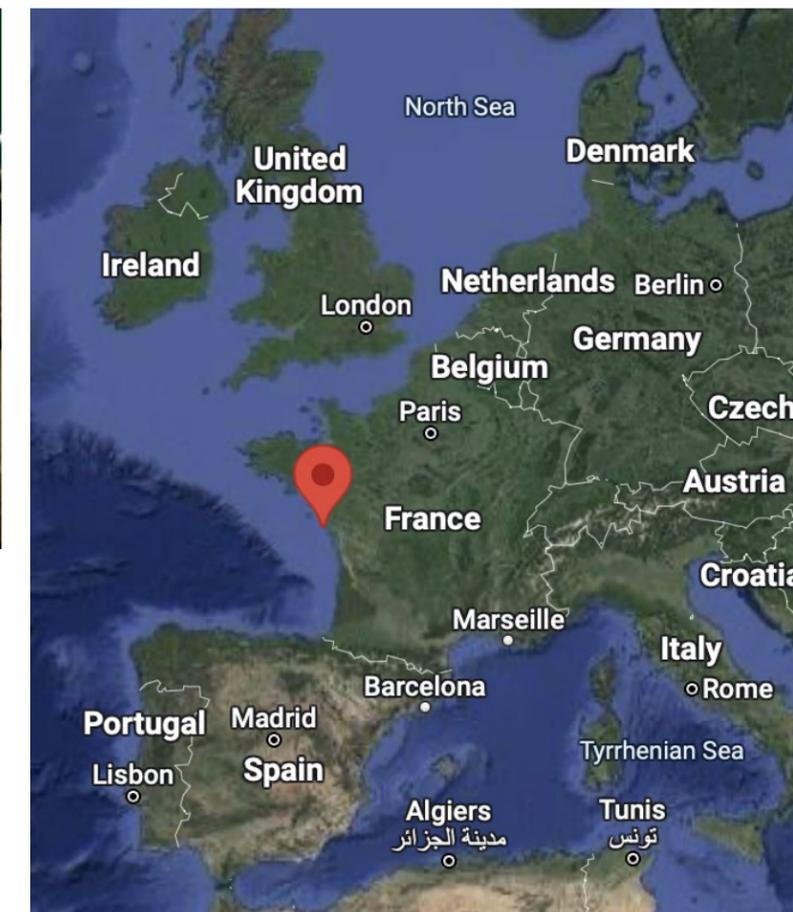
took place on the starboard side, 10m aft of the bow, which surprised everyone. The officer in charge of the watch, and the helmsman, said they saw the wake of a torpedo, but no one had spotted a submarine periscope. No distress message could be sent because electrical power was out in the ship's dynamo room.

The *J.G. McCullough* started to sink bow first. Badly partitioned, the ship went down in three minutes. The crew just managed to take shelter inside two lifeboats, which had been hastily dropped into the water. Meanwhile the escort patrol boat launched five depth charges but to no avail. Then it went to assist those stranded. The

escort patrol boat brought the shipwrecked sailors back to the harbour of La Pallice.

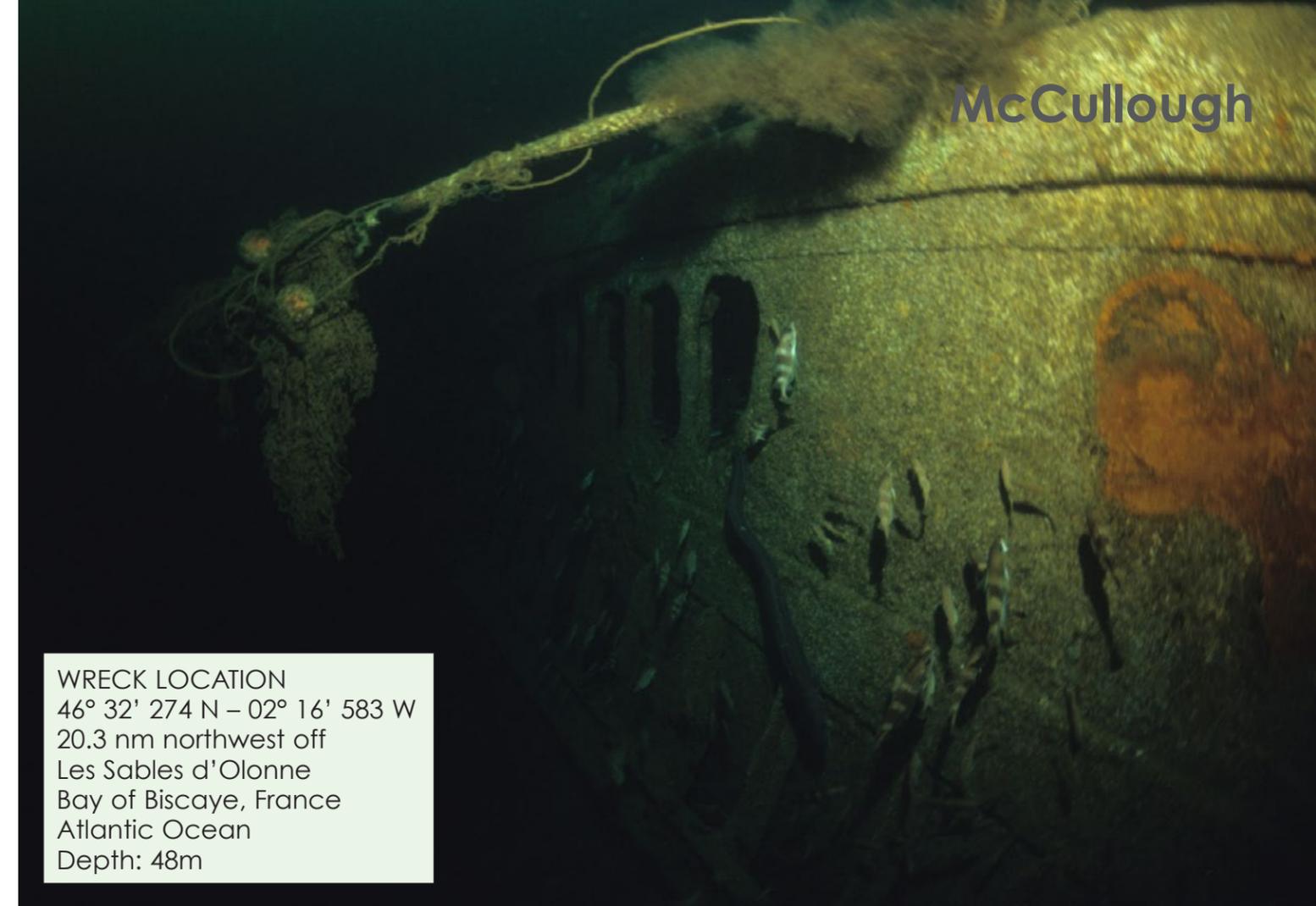
Only one crew member was lost: second engineer and officer, Daughtry, who had returned to the boiler room after the explosion in order to try to restart the engine.

The report at the time raised doubts as to whether the explosion



Location of wreck off Les Sables d'Olonne, France

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WRECK LOCATION
 46° 32' 274 N – 02° 16' 583 W
 20.3 nm northwest off
 Les Sables d'Olonne
 Bay of Biscaye, France
 Atlantic Ocean
 Depth: 48m



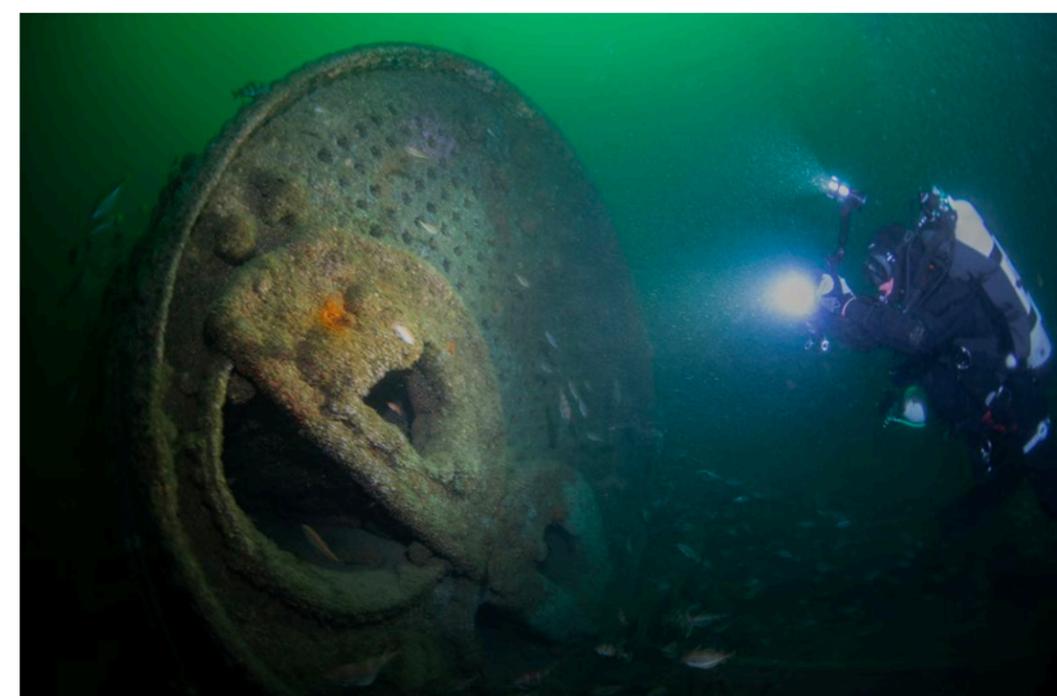
had been caused by a mine or a torpedo. From the German side, it was thought that the shipwreck must have been the work of UB 74.

UB 74 was a submarine of the UB III type (coastal torpedo attack boat class). It was 55.30m long and armed with 10 torpedoes and one 88mm canon. UB 74 had a crew of 34 and could dive to a depth of 75m. On the day of the alleged attack of the *J.G. McCullough*, UB 74 was commanded by Ernst Steindorff. It was eventually sunk by the patrol boat *Lorna* in the South of England (Lyme Bay) on 26 May 1918, using depth charges.

quite good shape at a depth of 48m, in particularly clear water, 20nm off Les Sables d'Olonne. A telephone cable, which started at the coastal town of St Hilaire de Riez (formerly linking the old world to the new, which is now out of service), runs across the wreck.

Thanks to its cargo of cement bags, which preserved the original shape of the wreck, except for the damage suffered at the bow due to the explosion, the remaining three quarters or so of the ship have been kept as they were on the day the vessel sank.

In summertime, a thick blanket of plankton develops in the 10m zone. What light penetrates through the depths to the wreck is enough to

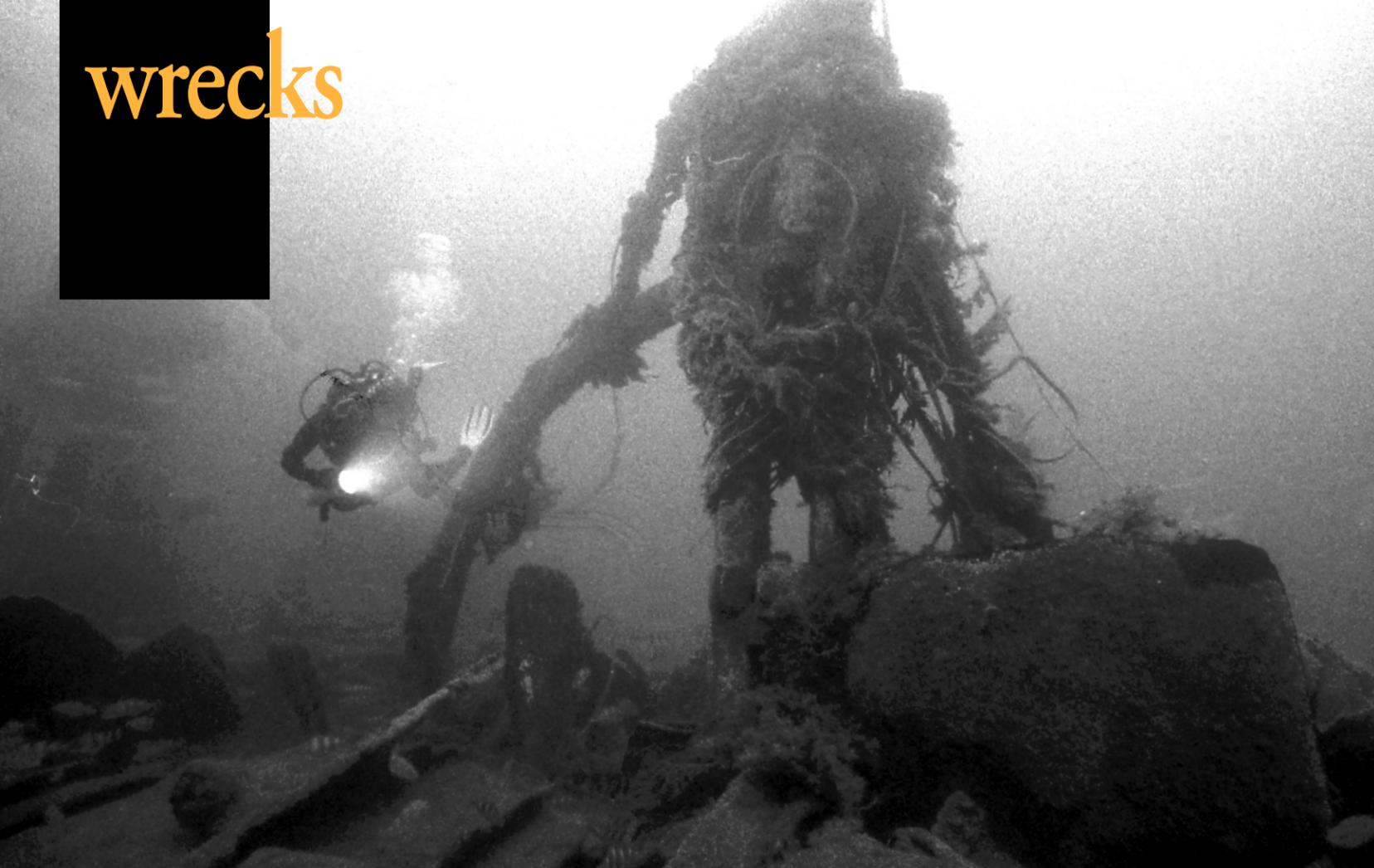


illuminate almost the whole ship, at a glance. Horizontal visibility often reaches 20m. The hull

rises to the height of four or five metres above the sea bottom. On the starboard side, part

View of the ship's deck, with its cargo still in place (above); The transatlantic cable that passes over the wreck (top left), and as seen from the starboard side (top right); Diver shines light on one of the boiler's starboard furnaces (right)

Diving the wreck
 The *J.G. McCullough* lies in



Diver at the top of the rudder and one of the propeller blades, as seen from the back of the wreck

of a cargo boom rests on the sand. It is possible to slip under the deck beams—in particular, at the front end of the port side—in order to swim one's way closer to the cargo and meet today's "crew members," mainly consisting of lobsters. On the starboard side, a large flap of metal sheet rests against the hull. Lots of harmless conger eels gather under it and hardly give way to our passage. On the port side, some pieces of the fittings that slipped out of the ship, can easily be recognised.

The most interesting part of the wreck is in the aft area. Here, two wonderful boilers are slightly displaced, and the imposing machine towering above this part of the wreck is colonised

with sea anemones. The frame of the stern still holds the rudder, but the propeller is half buried in the sand. A fishing net is tangled around the rudder stock, giving it a ghostly aspect.

It is an easy dive despite its depth. This compact wreck is easily navigated. Moreover, it is the only wreck in this area that is typical of the Great Lakes of North America (the engine and both boilers are located in the aft end). □

To learn more, see the video by Pascal Henaff about the Bay of Biscaye's wrecks off Les Sables d'Olonne at: [youtube.com/channel/UCnCdlg34vdGSqIGv4E1dq7A](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnCdlg34vdGSqIGv4E1dq7A) Pascal Henaff has been a diver since 1975 and an underwater

photographer since 1989. He has written articles for underwater magazines since 1995. Today, he is more specialized in reportages on wrecks. Visit: wildseapictures.com

Herve Marsaud has been a diver since 1990. He is a retired professor of applied arts at a technical high school, and a maritime history buff. Visit: sites.google.com/site/hervemarsaudphoto

P. Henaff and H. Marsaud's book, 60 Épaves en Vendée et Charente-Maritime, is available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Diver and wreck lover, Loïck Penhoat is a retired teacher who has worked abroad.



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British T-class submarine HMS Triumph

British WWII submarine located in the Aegean Sea

The British submarine HMS Triumph, which disappeared without a trace in 1942, has finally been discovered on the bed of the Aegean Sea by Greek researcher Kostas Thoktaridis and his team.

Kostas Thoctarides told state news agency ANA his team had located the wreck of HMS Triumph at a depth of 670ft at an undisclosed location in the Aegean Sea.

The HMS Triumph was a British T-Class submarine involved in military operations in the Aegean Sea and elsewhere in the European theatre of the Second World War. It carried out twenty missions, including attacks against Axis ships, landing British commandos and

rescuing Allied soldiers, until it disappeared during a mission in 1942. Eighty-four submariners were killed when the HMS Triumph sank.

HMS Triumph was last spotted by an Italian pilot about four nautical miles southeast of Cape Sounion, which is near Athens, at 12:00 noon on 9 January 1942.

For decades after its disappearance, various attempts to find it had been mounted by teams from the United Kingdom, Malta and Russia—all without success.

Thoctarides' search for the submarine began in 1998 and was "the hardest mission I have ever undertaken in my life," he posted on Facebook. "The history of the submarine is multi-aspected and unique in naval chronicles, as it is inseparably connected with the national

resistance and secret services of the time, which operated during the occupation," Thoktaridis told the Athens-Macedonian News Agency.

What sank the sub?

Before discovering the lost submarine at the bottom of the Aegean, several theories were proposed for its disappearance. Among them were the hypotheses it struck a mine and sunk, it was incapacitated by an accident diving, or struck land.

Thoctarides told ANA that the submarine's periscopes and hatches were down, indicating it was in a deep dive during its final moments. It appears to have sunk due to a powerful explosion in the fore section, but the cause of the blast remains unclear, he said.

□ SOURCES: ATHENS-MACEDONIAN NEWS AGENCY

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Wreck site off Japan identified as World War II US destroyer

USA's Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) confirms the identity of a wreck site off the coast of Okinawa, Japan as World War II Destroyer USS Mannert L. Abele (DD-733).

USS Mannert L. Abele (DD-733), was an Allen M. Sumner-class destroyer of the United States Navy, which was launched on 23 April 1944. On 12 April 1945, Mannert L. Abele was operating 75 miles off the northern coast of Okinawa, when enemy aircraft appeared on radar.

Despite numerous hits from 5-inch and light anti-aircraft fire and spewing smoke and flames, a Mitsubishi A6M Zero kamikaze first crashed into the starboard side. It penetrated the aft engine room where it exploded.

Only a minute later, Mannert L. Abele took a second and fatal hit from a Yokosuka MXY-7 Ohka kamikaze rocket-powered flying bomb that struck the starboard waterline abreast the forward fireroom. Its 2,600 lb (1,200 kg) warhead exploded, buckling the ship,

and "cutting out all power, lights, and communications."

Almost immediately, the destroyer broke in two, its midship section obliterated. Its bow and stern sections sank rapidly. It was the first US warship to be damaged or sunk by the rocket-powered Yokosuka MXY7 Ohka suicide flying bomb. The number of casualties in its sinking was 84.

Identification

The US Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) used information provided by Tim Taylor, an ocean explorer and CEO of Tiburon Subsea, and Taylor's "Lost 52 Project" team to confirm the identity of the Mannert L. Abele.

War grave

The wreck of the Mannert L. Abele is a US sunken military craft and the final resting place of sailors who lost their lives during the battle. As such, it is protected by US law and under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Navy. While non-intrusive activities, such as remote sensing documentation on US Navy sunken military craft are allowed, any activity that may result in the disturbance of a sunken military craft must be coordinated with the NHHC and, if appropriate, authorized through a relevant permitting program. □

SOURCE: US NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND



USS Mannert L. Abele off Boston Navy Yard, Massachusetts, 1 August 1944

BUREAU OF SHIPS COLLECTION, US NATIONAL ARCHIVES / PUBLIC DOMAIN





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Titanic shipwreck recreated in detailed 3D visualisation

The first full-sized digital scan of the *Titanic* provides a unique 3D view of the entire ship, revealing the remains as they lay submerged at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean with a level of detail that has never been captured before.

An ambitious digital imaging project has produced what researchers describe as a “digital twin” of the RMS *Titanic*, showing the wreckage of the doomed ocean liner as if the water has been drained away.

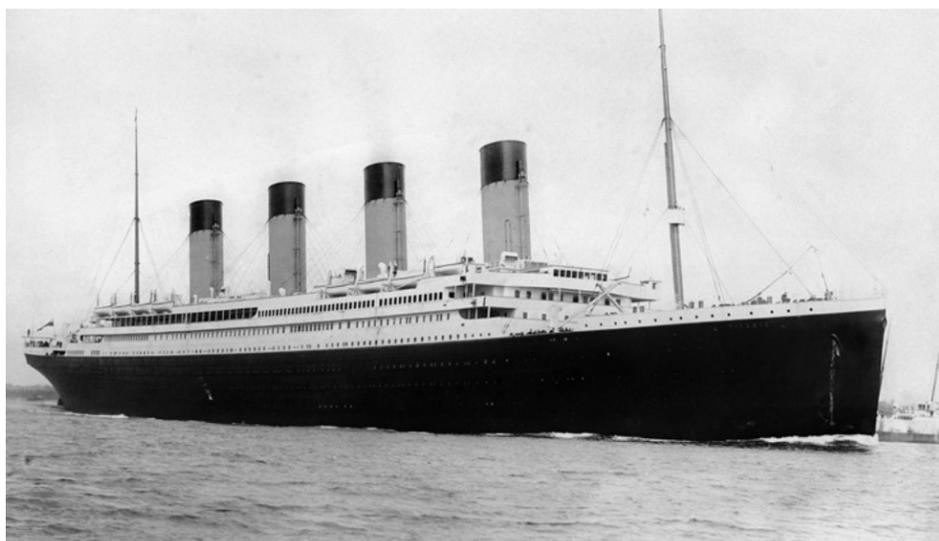
The model was created with data using deep-sea mapping gathered by two submersibles—named *Romeo* and *Ju-liet*—during a six-week expedition to the North Atlantic wreck

site in the summer of 2022, to map “every millimetre” of the wreckage as well as the entire three-mile debris field.

The project, undertaken by Magellan Ltd., a deepwater seabed mapping company, yielded more than 16 terabytes of data, 715,000 still images and a high-resolution video.

While parts of the ship—including the vast bow section—are immediately recognizable, other sections of the ship near the stern have yielded to over a century of decay, appearing now as little more than tangled piles of metallic debris. □

SOURCE: ATLANTIC PRODUCTIONS



RMS *Titanic*, 1912. Photo by Francis Godolphin Osbourne Stuart

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS / PUBLIC DOMAIN

Malaysia detains Chinese ship suspected of looting two British WWII wrecks

The UK Ministry of Defence condemns the “desecration” of the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and battleship HMS *Repulse*, which were sunk off the coast of Malaysia in 1941.

Malaysia's maritime authorities have detained a Chinese-flagged cargo ship amid reports this month that scavengers targeted two British World War Two wrecks off the coast of Malaysia—the HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*—which were sunk by Japanese torpedoes in 1941.

An inspection of the cargo ship led to the discovery of old steel and cannon shells believed to have been scavenged from the HMS *Prince of Wales*. The shells could be linked to a separate seizure by police at a Johor jetty last week of multiple unexploded World War II-era artillery.

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) stated that it was working with Malaysia's National Heritage Department and other agencies to identify the ordnance discovered.

Worst disaster

HMS *Prince of Wales* was a King George V-class battleship—the most modern British battleships in commission during the Second World War. In its final action, the vessel attempted to intercept Japanese troop convoys off the coast of Malaya when it was sunk alongside the

battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* by Japanese aircraft on 10 December 1941, two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Their sinking is considered one of the worst naval disasters in the history of the Royal Navy. It was also one of the first battles to show that even the most powerful of modern warships—the *Prince of Wales* was commissioned less than a year before it sank—were vulnerable without supporting air power.

Designated war graves

A spokesperson for the UK Ministry of Defence in London said: “We strongly condemn any desecration of any maritime military grave. Where we have evidence of desecration of the wrecks of Royal Navy vessels, we will take appropriate action, including working with regional governments and partners to prevent inappropriate activity at such sites.”

“We are distressed and concerned at the apparent vandalism for personal profit of

HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*,” said professor Dominic Tweddle, director general of the National Museum of the Royal Navy, in a statement.

“They are designated war graves. We are upset at the loss of naval heritage and the impact this has on the understanding of our Royal Navy history.”

Repeatedly looted

The British vessels, on the seabed some 100km (60 miles) off the eastern coast of Malaysia, had been targeted for decades. The shipwrecks are targeted by scavengers for their rare low-background steel, also known as “pre-war steel.” The low radiation in the steel makes it a rare and valuable resource for use in medical and scientific equipment.

In October 2014, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that both *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were being “extensively damaged” with explosives by scrap metal dealers. □ SOURCES: MALAYSIA MARITIME ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

COLLECTIONS OF THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS / PUBLIC DOMAIN



Royal Navy battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* in Singapore in 1941