

MYSTERY WRECK

Photos and story by Les Graham
Terrigal Diving School

Three miles out to sea due east from Terrigal, countless fishermen regularly lose anchors when out handling. On an echo sounder the area shows a large rise from the sea bed 170 ft. below of about 60-70 ft. Conjecture amongst fishermen was that there was probably a large wreck of some description. Whatever it was down there, some 17 storeys of a city office block below, it was an avid consumer of anchors and fishing lines. Week after week, the amateur fisherman would anchor there and week after week they would sail home less one anchor and a lot of tackle.

To try and allay some of the doubts and to put down some of the wild stories about Japanese submarines, a group of divers from the Terrigal Diving School and the Underwater Research Group of N.S.W. recently accompanied a local fisherman to the wreck.

To dive to this depth requires a certain amount of planning, for here a diver has just entered depths where he is likely to start to feel the effects of Nitrogen Narcosis, or Rapture of the Depths; where a diver starts to feel light headed and behave as if he were drunk — a very dangerous condition 170 ft. down. Not only does he have to cope with this, but also has to watch his time at this depth, to make sure that when he leaves the sea bed he has enough air left to give him time to pause at say 10 or 20 ft. for perhaps 10 minutes to decompress, to prevent the formation of Nitrogen Bubbles in the body tissues; the Bends.

The planning over, the divers drop over the side, Helen the only woman on the dive, her husband Chuck, both Canadians; Dick an American Diver, Dita a Swiss and myself. As we descend some 60 ft. below there were flashes of silver and as we neared them, we could see they were large yellowtailed Kingfish, perhaps fifty of them in a shoal circling the anchor rope. We were now just 100 ft. down. We proceeded deeper and as we passed 150 ft. the wreck appeared below.

It was obvious from first glance that the wreck below us was not a submarine, but a cargo vessel of some sort and not a very large one.

It was immediately apparent just what caused such a large echo sounder reading, for above the wreck in a pyramid some 50 ft. high, was ton after ton of yellowtail so closely packed that it was impossible to see through them. The wreck itself was swarming with fish, from Teragalin to Nanigyi, with a fair sprinkling of Morwong and Leatherjacket.

Because it would be cumbersome to carry around with him, upon reaching the anchor Dita tied to the wreck the Underwater Camera Case he had brought down to test for leaks, intending to recover it later.

The anchor had hooked into the wreck amidships, so Dita and I left the others and proceeded to explore the bow section. The first thing that was obvious was the abundance of anchors lost by countless fishermen — reef anchors, sand anchors, big anchors, small anchors, anchors with rope, anchors with chain, all lost with a curse from above. "There must be a fortune waiting for the first chap to bring all these up," I remember thinking.

The ship was a steel ship with two inter-connected holds, half full of coal. Pieces of broken machinery were everywhere. The winch on the forepeak used to haul up the twin anchors was perched perilously on rusting plates, putting an odd twist on the chains running over the decks. Swimming back towards the stern, most of the superstructure was missing, leaving the engine room open, the boiler standing amid a jumbled mass of pipes and valves, all heavily encrusted with some of the sharpest barnacles I have ever encountered.

Further on towards the stern over twisted superstructure and deck plates and then over the stern down to the sand 15 ft. below with a quick check at the propeller to see what it was made of, before we had to surface due to lack of air. Unfortunately, the metal of the propeller crumbled easily from a couple of blows from my knife,

exposing the familiar black powdery substance into which cast iron seems to decompose after long immersion in the ocean. I cursed, I had hoped it would be Phosphor Bronze.

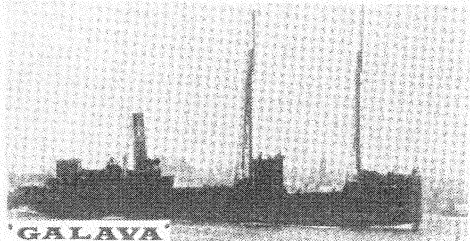
Dita and I rejoined the others at the anchor, but now I started to get worried: there was only four of us when there should have been five. Dick was not with the group — I signalled to the others who were about to start up the anchor to wait. Helen and Chuck were both trying to signal something to me, but it was difficult to comprehend just what they were trying to get over. In the meantime Dita was chipping at a lump of metal he had found and took it to be a port-hole, but it turned out to be just an odd lump of iron.

By now, my air, and probably everyone else's was running low. I had planned to spend a total of 15 minutes on the bottom and I had already exceeded this by a couple of minutes by waiting for the others and air was precious. To stay at this depth just one minute extra reduced my available air for decompression by nearly six minutes and I had used an extra two minutes. Finally, the four of us started up the long ascent to the surface, Dita and I obviously worried by the absence of one of our companions, although this concern was not reflected by Chuck and Helen, and I wondered why.

Halfway up the anchor line a large ocean Sun Fish at least 10 ft. in diameter swam casually by without no apparent glance in our direction. When we reached the 20 ft. depth we stopped for our first decompression stop of five minutes. Towards the end of this period I paid the penalty for those extra two minutes on the sea bed, for I was running out of air and was glad of the foresight we had in hanging a spare aqualung over the side of the boat 10 ft. down in case of any contingency such as this. I let go the anchor line and swam to the spare lung and commenced to spend 10 minutes there decompressing before coming to the surface. Meanwhile the others using a decompression meter to indicate the length of their stops were still on the anchor rope at the 10 ft. level. I saw Chuck leave them and swim to the side of the boat and disappear out of the water. Dita and Helen both did the same and finally I also surfaced. Sitting in the boat much to my relief was Dick. It appeared he had reached the wreck in the company of Helen and Chuck and suffered quite severe Nitrogen Narcosis and decided to surface letting them know his intention.

Dick assured us that he has no recollection of the wreck whatsoever and was glad to be wearing an inflatable life jacket which he partially inflated to give him support at the surface. Once back in the boat and preparing to pull up the anchor I felt a slight pain in my right shoulder and only too aware of the fact that overweight people are more susceptible to the bends than others I decided to go down to the 10 ft. level for a little longer and decompress again, even though I was certain that the pain was caused by wrenching the shoulder getting into the boat.

Once back aboard after 8 minutes sojourn at 10 ft. we headed home towards Terrigal. Each



of us discussing our dive and whether he had felt any effects of Narcosis. Dita agreed that he felt slightly light headed but was confident it had not affected his thinking to any degree, when somebody remarked about his camera case and he suddenly realised that it was still down there tied to the wreck. Perhaps Raptures of the Deep affected him more than he thought!

Unfortunately, on a successive dive a few days later to look for the camera case it was found to have freed itself and floated away. If anybody comes across a large perspex box with a number of handles and controls on it, would they please contact the Terrigal Diving School, The Haven, Terrigal, N.S.W. 2260, Australia.

Subsequent enquiries in the area have revealed that the wreck is almost certainly that of the "Galava", which sunk in calm seas on the night of 9th February, 1927.

The "Galava" as can be seen from the accompanying photographs was a small Coastal Collier, built in 1906 in England, and commenced operations from Sydney in 1909. Preliminary research into records to try and identify the wreck had initially discounted the "Galava", due to the superstructure amidships. As can be seen from my sketch of the wreck, there is no sign of any superstructure whatsoever and it was thought doubtful that this could have simply disappeared, particularly as by the amount of coal in her holds she had not turned turtle or rolled on the sea bed.

The discovery that much of the superstructure was timber and that in 40 years it would almost have certainly rotted away, make it almost certain that she is the "Galava", particularly as without this centre wheelhouse, etc., the silhouettes of the photograph and the sketch now line up almost identical. •

SUBSCRIBE TODAY
SKINDIVER MAGAZINE
Send \$7.60 for 12 issues to:
DIVE, box 20 WHANGAREI.

It will be mailed to you direct from U.S.A.

WHAT ARE YOU MISSING ?

Dec: The Great "Life" mag, Shark Fatality Hoax,
Jan: New look edition; more pages (90) more colour,
Diving in Fiji for Scuba Divers,
Feb.—Diving in Tahiti,
March—Ready Cash.