



Technical diver on one of the several deep aircraft wrecks resting on the sea floor around Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands

Text and photos by Sabine Kerkau

**For over a year, I had been looking forward to a very special expedition that was planned for May 2014. But as you know, life does not always go the way you plan. The expedition was postponed, and once again, I had to find an alternative, at relatively short notice.**

After getting some interesting offers in March 2014, I met a rebreather diver from Gran Canaria at the Dive and Travel Show in Madrid. He suggested that I come to Gran Canaria for wreck diving. At first, I was not particularly interested, because I really wanted to do some nice wreck dives, and the Canary Islands were not necessarily known for their wealth of wrecks. I had been to Lanzarote a few times, but I had never seen any interesting wrecks there. On the



# *Deep Aircraft Wrecks of* Gran Canaria

contrary, I was told again and again that there were no wrecks anywhere on the Canary Islands.

When I mentioned this to my Canarian

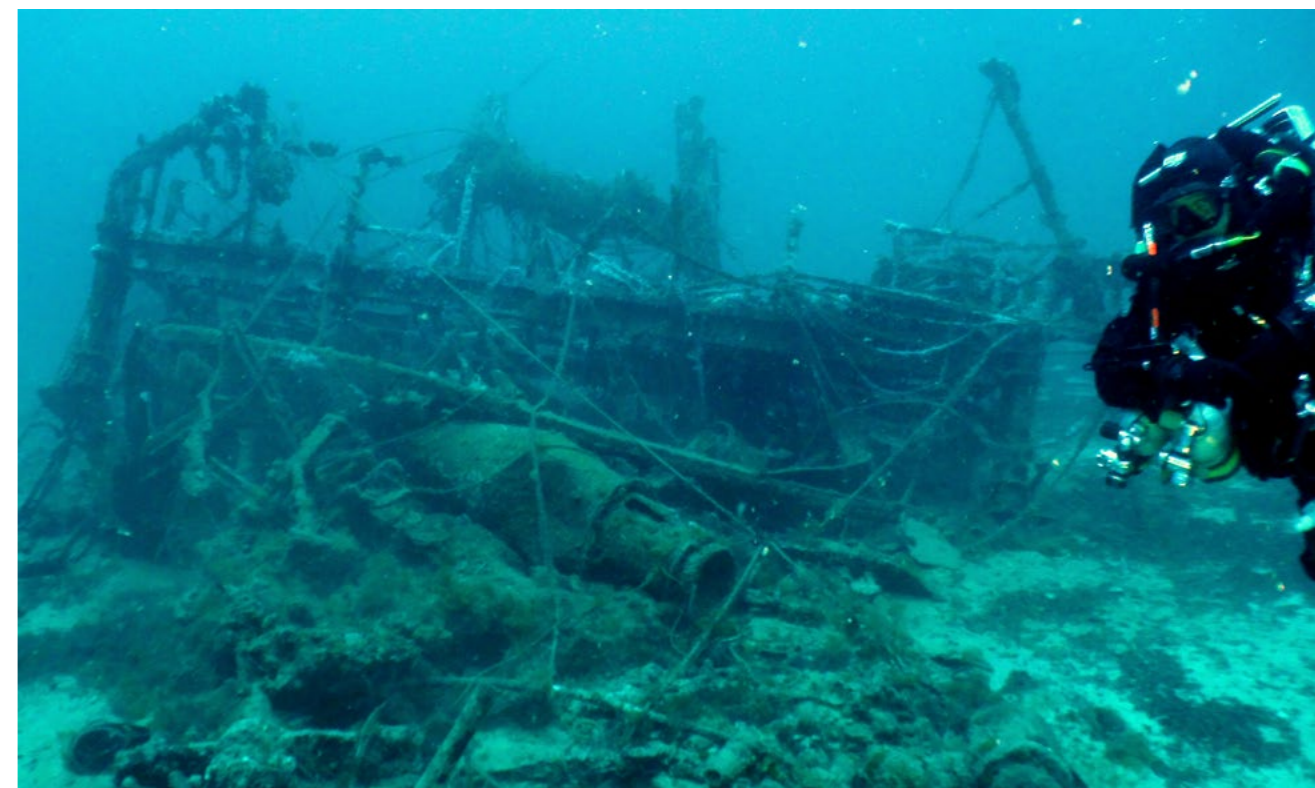
friend, he just laughed. "Come and see what we have! You will not regret it."

Over the next few weeks, he kept sending me links to videos of some offshore

wrecks, which his dive group had taken. Among them was a video of an airplane wreck, a Douglas C-47. The wreck looked really interesting, and supposedly, there

were even more aircraft wrecks. This was certainly not an everyday occurrence, and I decided to fly to Gran Canaria for a wreck dive.





Douglas C47 wreck (above) off the harbor of Puerto Escala, Gran Canaria; Lead Wreck (right)



### Diving and tech support

The starting point for our dives was the beach of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is located south of Gran Canaria and is thus, most months of the year, quite sheltered from the wind. This, and the fact that the majority of the wrecks can be reached within 15 to 20 minutes by RIB, made it possible to dive a wreck almost every day.

The wrecks, which are approached from Puerto Rico, lie in depth ranges between 60 and 65m. For rebreather divers, 3-liter bottles were provided for diluent and oxygen and bailout bottles. As a diluent, there was usually a trimix 10/50. Bailout mixtures were trimix 18/38, nitrox

50 and 100% oxygen. Team bailout was not permitted.

Our basic times were between 25 and 35 minutes, with the total dive time mostly in the range of 90 minutes. We dived in buddy teams. There were no fixed lines at the wrecks. We used the anchor rope as our ascent and descent line. Under the boat hung four decompression lines to a depth of about 16m. When all the divers were on these lines, the anchor was hoisted, and we drifted with the current.

The support and help we received at the base and on the boat were unique. The loading and unloading of the boat was done by the base team. They even

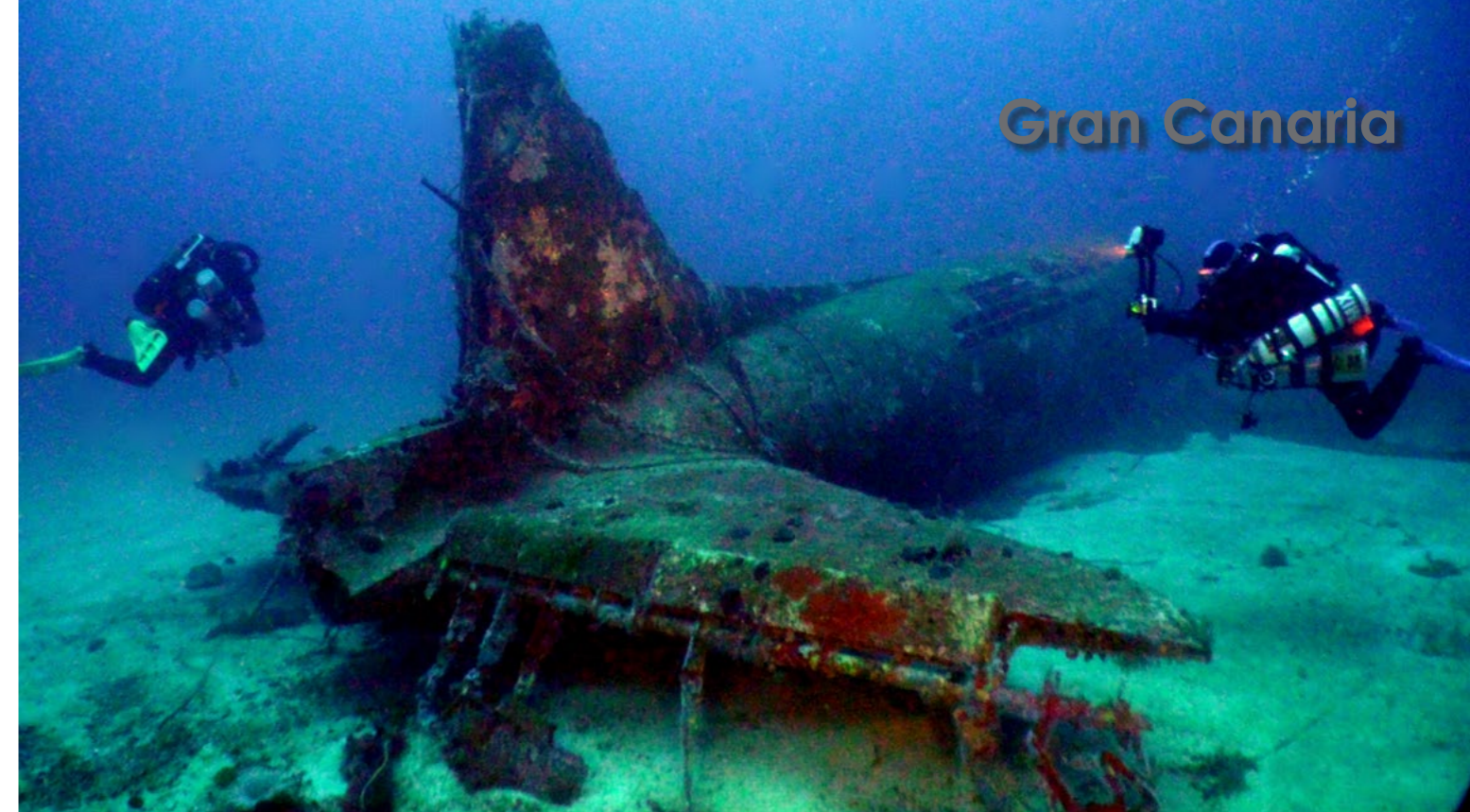
carried my rebreather to the boat and back. Over the week we spent diving, we felt like friends—not like customers on a base. And that is exactly what our host wanted.

### Douglas C-47

**Location.** The Douglas is about five nautical miles off the harbor of Puerto Escala. By boat, the trip to the dive site takes about 15 minutes. The maximum depth is 65m.

**History.** On 2 October 1973, the Douglas

took off at 10:10 a.m. from the Las Palmas airport for a test flight. At an altitude of 4,500 feet, the engines were to be tested. The pilot switched off all engines one after the other and started them again. After a few attempts, the left engine could no longer be ignited. The pilot, Tomas Adin, decided to make an emergency landing on the water. The landing took place at 11:00 a.m. off the coast of Arguineguín. The crew of the Douglas—consisting of the pilot, co-pilot, mechanic and radio operator—survived the ditching. They were brought ashore



THIS PAGE: Wreck of the Douglas C-47 airplane that rests off the harbor of Puerto Escala, Gran Canaria

re by fishermen. The plane stayed on the surface for about 10 minutes before it sank.

**Diving.** Depending on where the anchor was placed, we floated on the descent, directly over the old machine. The visibility was very good, so the wreck could be admired as a whole. First, I got the impression that the Douglas was just parked on the bottom of the sea. It seemed almost completely intact. Only when I looked closely could I see that the nose of the aircraft and the cockpit were dented. On the hull, some of the outer surface panels were missing. This made for interesting lighting conditions inside the machine. The hatches were open, and it was safe to enter the wreck.



The Douglas was not a big wreck. Nevertheless, there was much to discover. We made two dives there, in impressive light and visibility conditions.

### Texan T-6

**Location.** The Texan wreck lies at 63m. It is rarely dived because it lies in the channel between Gran Canaria and Tenerife.

There are often very strong current and high waves. The journey takes about 45 minutes.

**History.** On 30 September 1974, Captain Antonio Conde Lorenzo undertook a training flight with Commander Martinez. They started at 9:15 a.m. from Gando



Airport, along with two other T-6s. There was radio contact between the pilot and flight control. After completing their exercises at 4,500 feet, the plane made

a right turn, lost altitude and crashed into the sea for unknown reasons. Captain Lorenzo died in the crash. Commander Martinez survived and swam to shore.

Gran Canaria



Diver (above) and moray eel (left) on Texan T-6 wreck (right); PIO 12 wreck (top right)

### PIO 12

**Location.** The PIO 12 was probably a high sea trawler. The wreck lies at 65m depth. The dive site can be reached by inflatable boat within 10 minutes.

**Diving.** At first, we did not notice much about the wreck on our dive, because it was completely enclosed by a huge school of fish. The wreck itself was pretty much destroyed, but it was still worth the dive. There were countless moray eels living on this wreck.

Since the PIO 12 is not often dived, many details about it are yet to be discovered.

### The Lead Wreck

Nobody knows the true name of this wreck, not even when and why it went down. It was given the name "Lead Wreck" because when it was discovered by our dive guide, Dirk, the wreck was overhung, layer upon layer, with nets. Dirk said he collected about 500 to 600kg of

lead weights that had hung on the nets, which he salvaged from the wreckage.

**Location.** This wreck is located about 15 minutes from the port at a depth of about 60m.

**Diving.** The hull was almost completely disintegrated. Nevertheless, there were many details to admire: big winches, masts with crow's nests and much more. The most impressive thing for me was a huge amphora, completely undamaged and unopened, lying between the remains of the wreckage. It was a very interesting dive with good light and visibility.

### Afterthoughts

Gran Canaria has more submerged wrecks on other shores. Many of these wrecks can only be dived in favorable wind conditions. But it is not easy to find a dive operation that services these dive sites. Unfortunately, the owner of the base with whom we worked together has since passed on the management of the dive operation. ■



Sabine Kerkau is a German technical diver, dive writer and underwater photographer based in Switzerland. For more information, please visit: [Sabine-Kerkau.com](http://Sabine-Kerkau.com).

See a video about the wrecks we dived at: <https://vimeo.com/96911469>.



Fairey Swordfish seen in flight in 2012



TONY HISGETT / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS / CC BY 2.0

## WWII torpedo bomber found off Malta

**Tests of an autonomous underwater vehicle off Malta uncovers the wreck of a Fairey Swordfish—a legendary WWII medium-sized biplane torpedo bomber and reconnaissance aircraft.**

Despite being already considered obsolescent at the outbreak of the conflict in 1939 the biplane was nonetheless in frontline service throughout the Second World War and achieved some spectacular successes such as sinking one battleship and damaging two others of the Regia Marina (the Italian Navy) during the Battle of Taranto in 1940, and its role in the sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck* in 1941.

The Swordfish also flew a high level of anti-shipping sorties in the Mediterranean, many aircraft being based at Malta. While there were never more than a total of 27 Swordfish aircraft stationed on the island at a time, the type succeeded in sinking an average of 50,000 tons of enemy shipping per month across a nine-month period. The recorded Swordfish losses were low, especially in relation to the high sortie rate of the aircraft and in light of the fact that many

aircraft lacked any blind-flying equipment, making night flying even more hazardous.

### Robots with AI

The discovery of the wreck was part of a long-term project by Chris Clark and colleagues at Harvey Mudd College in California to bring robotics to archaeology. His team has developed computer systems that use artificial intelligence (AI) to help better analyse images of the sea floor, as well as algorithms to improve the search and navigation of a target area.

During the second world war, Malta was an important Allied base and was heavily bombed by Axis forces, resulting in many planes and ships sinking to the

bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. This makes it a hotspot for wrecks and the perfect testing ground for underwater autonomous vehicles. "It is dangerous and time-consuming to send divers to look for wrecks, so obviously, we need to get robots down there," said Clark.

The team found the bomber in 2017, but as there are plenty of people who are interested in finding sunken treasure, the discovery has been kept under wraps. The team is currently in discussions about making it a protected site and until then, they will not reveal its location for fear of treasure seekers stealing parts of the plane. "It is a piece of history," said Clark. ■ SOURCE: NEW SCIENTIST



US NAVY / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS / PUBLIC DOMAIN

Historical photo of Swordfish taking off from HMS Ark Royal

## New artificial reefs under way in British Columbia

The Artificial Reef Society of British Columbia (ARSBC) is pleased to announce the sinking of the first of four surplus vessels as an artificial reef in Powell River, BC. The sinking of YOGN-82 took place on Saturday, 23 June, between 11:00 and 12:00 noon.

The ARSBC, which has sunk more ships and aircraft than any other non-profit group in the world to create marine habitat, has worked and consulted with Catalyst Paper for the sinking of the first vessel. In addition to the letters of endorsement from the Tla'amin Nation (Sliammon), the Regional District of Powell River and the City of Powell River, approvals were granted by the responsible federal government agencies.

The breakwater vessels are all American Second World War surplus, which were purchased over time by the mill. Constructed from cast reinforced concrete, they have survived afloat and have been part of Powell River's seascape acting as a breakwater system protecting the mill's log pond and foreshore. Ranging from 109 to 128m long, and weighing between 6,000 to 8,000 tons, these historic relics are the last of their kind afloat anywhere in the world. Consequently, this project has the potential to become a significant dive tourism attraction for the city of Powell River.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARSBC

USS YOGN 82, which will be sunk by ARSBC, was a US Navy tanker barge.

### Four vessels sunk

ARSBC President Howie Robins believes this exciting new project will build on the organization's successful record of accomplishment of converting ships into productive long-term reef habitat. "This will be the most unique and creative marine habitat project ever undertaken by our Society.

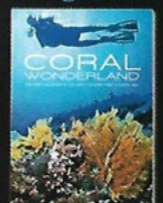


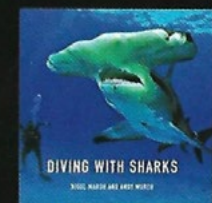
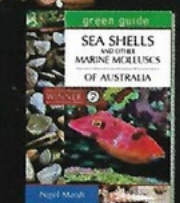
The challenge will be to place up to four of these large vessels in a group formation at variable depths ranging from 25-35 meters. Divers of all skill levels seek novelty, and this will be a dive back into maritime history for adventure divers worldwide" said Mr. Robins.

■ SOURCE: ARSBC




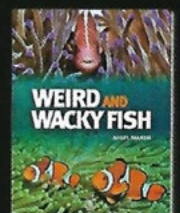
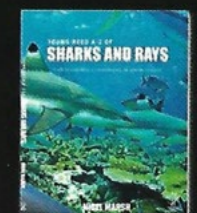
## NIGEL MARSH PHOTOGRAPHY


Nigel Marsh is an Australian photojournalist, underwater photographer and author. Working with New Holland Publishers, Nigel has produced a number of guide books for divers and snorkellers, and also a series of children's books with marine related themes.

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The Wreck Preservation Ale has been described as "dark, malty, and stormy with hints of blackcurrant and spices"

## Beer recreated from yeast found on 220-year-old shipwreck

Australian brewery recreates the world's oldest beer using 220-year-old yeast discovered in the depths of Sydney Cove—Australia's oldest merchant shipwreck.

In a groundbreaking partnership between the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, the Australian Wine Research Institute and James Squire Brewery, the world's oldest beer has been resurrected. The beer, appropriately named, The Wreck – Preservation Ale, will go on sale for a limited time only in June.

The Sydney Cove left Calcutta, India, in 1796 for a fledgling penal colony in Sydney, Australia—but before it could reach its final destination, the ship sank. It was not discovered until 200 years later when a team of amateur divers stumbled upon the long lost wreck. Ceramics, leather shoes, cannons and anchors were brought to the surface, but the greatest treasure was found inside sealed glass bottles.

### Oldest bottled alcohol

Twenty-two of those vessels remained sealed, contents untouched, according to the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, which keeps the artifacts in its permanent collection. In 1993, experts from the Australian Wine Re-



JAMES SQUIRE BREWERY

search Institute took samples from some of the sealed bottles and determined they were grapes, port wine and beer, making it the world's oldest bottled alcohol on record. The secure corkage and cool ocean temperatures had preserved the contents, and this one-of-a-kind find was carefully stored at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston.

Now, 20 years later, brewers are hoping to bring some of this old beer back to life using some of the yeast found on the ship.

"I thought we might be able to culture yeast and recreate a beer that hasn't been on the planet for 220 years," David Thurrowgood, museum conservator and chemist, said in a statement.

### Rare strain

To resurrect this 18th-century beverage,

the team re-examined the contents of the bottles and isolated the yeast. Analysis of the genetic make-up revealed that it was a rare hybrid strain worlds away from the types used to make modern beer.

Taming this historic yeast wasn't easy, according to brewer Stu Korch. "Particular care has been taken to extract and grow this yeast into a brew that enhances its unique characteristics." But, through a process of trial and error, the impossible was achieved.

### Dark and stormy

"After a lot of different recipes, we decided it was perfect for a porter style," said Haydon Morgan, the brewery's head brewer. The Wreck Preservation Ale has been described as "dark, malty, and stormy with hints of blackcurrant and spices". ■

SOURCE: JAMES SQUIRE BREWERY



MUSEUM SOUTHEAST DENMARK

## 500-year-old wreck uncovered in Denmark

An excavation for a new apartment complex and underground parking in the town of Køge, about 45km south of Copenhagen, uncovered a surprisingly well preserved 500-year-old shipwreck, which is one of the biggest clinker-built vessels from that era.

The team of archaeologists is excited because it is a rare find, and the ship has already provided several surprises in regards to unusual design features. The vessel is estimated to have been about 16m long and 7m wide.

The ship, which is one of the largest clinker-built ships of the time in Denmark, is built of massive oak planks, which are very well-preserved with remains of wood and iron rivets, caulking and ropes, museum inspector Annemette Kjærgaard, Museum Southeast Denmark, wrote in a press release.

It is very unusual to find timber which is so well preserved that it is even possible to see tooling marks, explained excavation coordinator Jeppe Færch-Jensen.

The bottom of the ship hasn't been uncovered yet, but it is here the archaeologists expect to find the reason as to why the ship foundered. ■



MUSEUM SOUTHEAST DENMARK

