

Hans Hass

Under the Seven Seas

by Patrick Baker

Books of fine underwater photographs are now commonplace. As beautiful as many of these are I have lost count of the “coffee table volumes” featuring the underwater world that have appeared in the past 35 years. However, the first such book, a now very rare volume, appeared in Germany in 1955 and in England the following year.

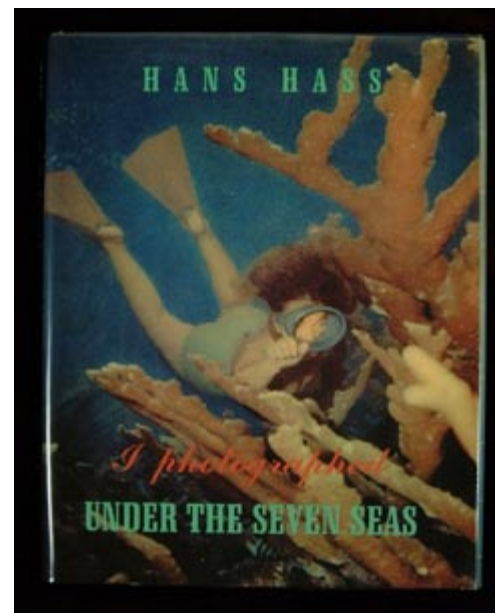
Hans Hass's *I Photographed under the Seven Seas* is an compilation of his photographs, work which had begun just before WWII. On page after page are unique images from Hass' pioneering underwater experiences; the first sub-surface pictures of whale sharks, sperm whales, manta rays and coral gardens. Of the 148 images only a handful are in colour, reflecting publishing practices of the time rather than photographic ability. Hass had in fact been producing underwater colour since 1939 although the majority of his published work was monochrome. (In 1997, on being shown some of Australian photographer Wade Hughes' modern black-and-white pictures, Hass exclaimed “Ah, Real Photography!”).



In this book his pictures, and those of his colleagues and wife, Lotte, were complimented by Hass's description of the “Why, When and Hows” of his work; the research expeditions as well as the principles and technical details of underwater photography.

However, as ground- (wave-?) breaking as this book was it was not Hans Hass' first underwater photographic publication. In 1942 he produced *Fotojagd am Meersgrund*, an even more rare, photo-filled handbook, on what must have seemed at that time the improbable, even impossible, practice of underwater photography.

Some years ago, unable to find an original of Hans Hass's *I Photographed under the Seven Seas* I asked Helmut Debelius if he could

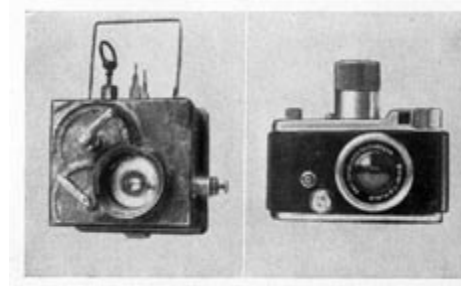


keep an eye open for a copy of the German version. He wrote back to say he had been unable to find me one... but “wondered if this was of interest”. I opened the package and there was “this”; Hass's 1942 underwater photographic primer. Here for me was a book of dreams; a book of which I had been unaware!

Although unable to read the German text I was entranced as I turned over page of illustrated page (200 pages, with 104 photographs). My knowledge of Hass's early exploits had been gained from many readings of *Diving to Adventure*, the first in 1955. That classic describes the failures of his first photographic attempts and is illustrated with a small selection of his successes. *Fotojagd am Meersgrund* shows, apparently,

Hans and Lotte Hass with underwater Leica and the very first RolleiMarine camera housing; Queensland, 1952

State-of-the-art underwater Robot camera, circa 1942



the whole collection of underwater pictures from his first, 1939/40, Caribbean expedition. Now I could see how he learned from his initial failures and, with impressive self-will, gained success. He was aged 20 but was already sure of the potential for direct biological observations under the sea, with photography an essential tool for communicating this to the widest possible public. Among the illustrations are pictures of aluminium and transparent (German plexiglass?) housings, goggle divers, with and without fins and usually armed with long fish spears. But, mostly, unique photographs of the underwater world. There is a motor drive sequence and several colour plates. Longley and Martin's 1927 National Geographic article had shown colour photographs



*Colour plate of Jörg Böhler
amongst Caribbean corals*

taken on very slow Autochrome glass plates, illuminated, albeit realistically, with a virtual bomb of magnesium flash powder. Hass's available light photos, taken on the early, rather subdued, 35mm Agfacolor Neu film, are the earliest colour images I have seen taken by a free-swimming diver. 16mm movie film was shot using tripod mounted camera and bulky diving helmet, before discarding these too to swim freely. (Some of this film can be viewed on the *(British) Historical Diving Society's* video, *DIVING From the Past –Into the Future; Part 1*).

The book has a forward by "The Sea Devil" himself, the raider Count

von Luckner, a Great War hero to Germanic youth. In fact Hass bought his first research ship *Sea Devil* from the Count. He never got to actually operate it as a mobile research base, for it was seized by the Soviets as war booty. However, by 1942, the seeds for the future of modern underwater research and photography had been sown. Within 10 years Hans and Lotte's *Xarifa* had begun to explore the Oceans, manned by marine scientists and equipped with laboratories and finely engineered still and movie cameras designed by themselves. The world-wide awareness of the underwater world had begun.

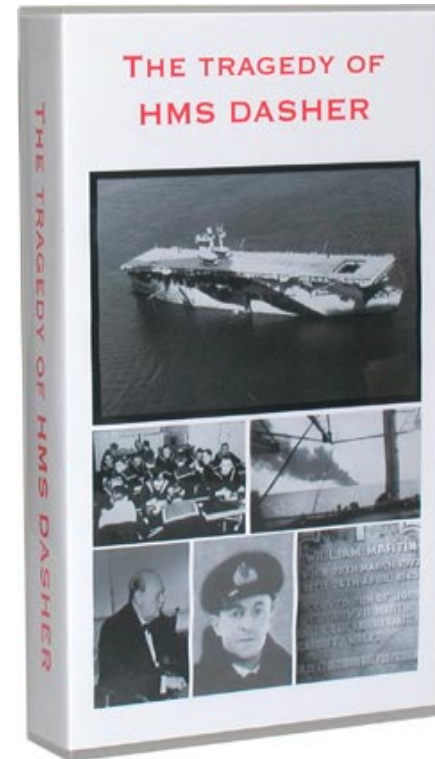
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Baker Portrait by John Mokrzycki



The Tragedy of HMS Dasher



On March 27th 1943 HMS Dasher, a hastily converted aircraft carrier, mysteriously exploded and sank within 8 minutes in the Clyde. Of the 528 men on board, only 149 survived. 379 lives were lost.

Of the 379 who perished, only 23 were given an official burial. However many more bodies - either brought ashore or washed up on local beaches and possibly burned beyond recognition, lie in unmarked plots. To this day, no acknowledgement has been made of the number or the whereabouts of these unmarked graves.

"The Tragedy of HMS Dasher" is a 54 minute documentary video about the short life and tragic end of a ship that is still surrounded in controversy.

Using archive footage and interviews with survivors and witnesses, the video recreates the events leading up to the tragedy and then exposes the Government's absolute veil of secrecy regarding the truth about the sinking. This lasting and callous secrecy has left hundreds of families not knowing what happened to their sons, brothers, relatives or loved ones and most went to their graves still not knowing.

VHS copies cost £16.95 (+£2.50 UK post) Total £19.45

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