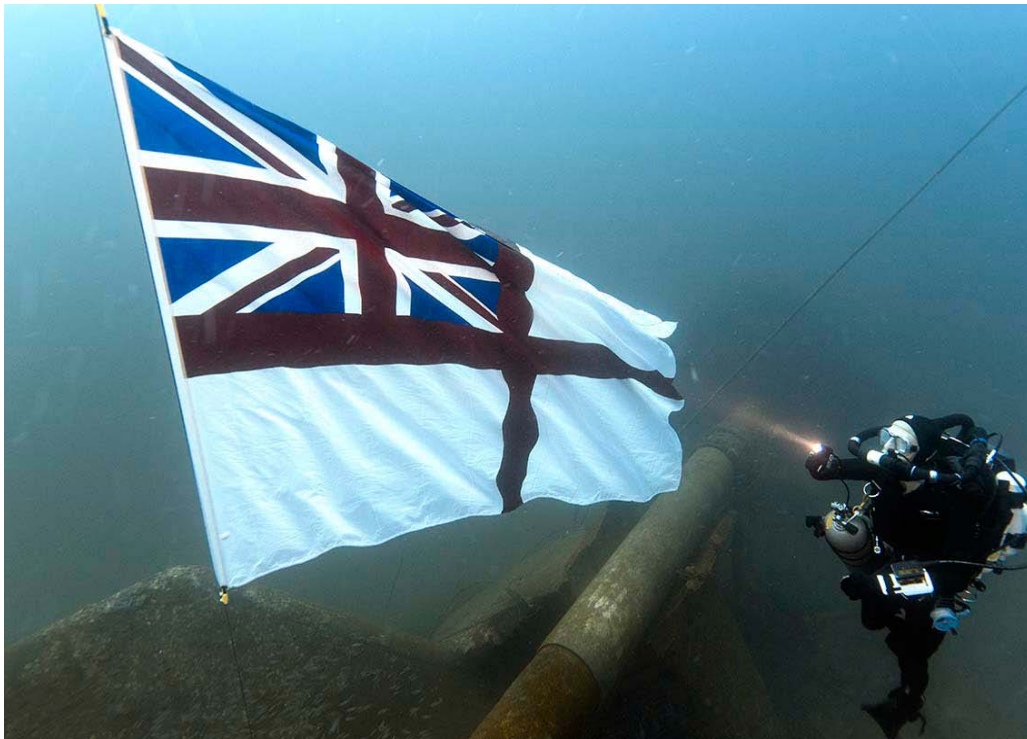




Adam examines the White Ensign on HMS Repulse . Canon 550d, Tokina 11-16mm Wide angle lens, Sea&sea YS-D1 Strobes(x2), Aquatica housing, 8in Dome f/7.1, 1/30, ISO400, 11mm

bombers. The 270m long, 44,000t Prince of Wales was hit by a single torpedo in the first wave of attacks and crippled, her damaged propeller shaft shaking violently and shattering water tight seals and bulkheads throughout the ship. Repulse meanwhile was having better luck and superbly handled by her Captain managed to dodge 19 torpedoes over three separate attacks, but with Prince of Wales out of action the aging battle cruiser could not hold off the Japanese

indefinitely. Against a concerted attack by another 17 torpedo bombers she was hit once on the Starboard side and a further four times on the Port side. The 242m, 32,000t ship capsized and sank in just 11 minutes along with 508 of her officers and men.

With the Repulse sunk and the Prince of Wales crippled a final attack was made to finish her off in which three torpedoes hit the ship. Finally, almost 2 hours after she was first damaged, HMS Prince of Wales



Fuel Oil still seeps from the Repulse over 70 years after she sank.. Canon 550d, Tokina 11-16mm Wide angle lens, Sea&sea YS-D1 Strobes(x2), Aquatica housing, 8in Dome f/10, 1/50, ISO800, 16mm

capsized and sank. 327 of her crew were killed.

The sinking of the two ships was a public relations disaster for Britain, Churchill and specifically for the Royal Navy. HMS Repulse was one of the most famous and popular ships in the fleet and a veteran of the first world war. Of more material concern however was how the Prince of Wales, one of the most modern, sophisticated and powerful ships in the fleet, if not the world, had been crippled by a

single torpedo and then sunk by an enemy widely regarded as inferior in every way.

An investigation was launched during the war which lead to a number of recommendations, but even as late as 1966 the Royal Navy were still in search of answers and deployed a diving team to investigate the wreck. It was during these dives the tradition of raising the White Ensign on the two wrecks originated. As the interest of the navy waned an increasing



Adam's torch backlights the muzzle of a 15" gun on HMS Repulse. Canon 550d, Tokina 11-16mm Wide angle lens, Sea&sea YS-D1 Strobos(x2), Aquatica housing, 8in Dome f/9, 1/30, ISO400, 16mm



The remains of the prop shaft. Blown apart by salvage teams to access the bronze bearings. Canon 550d, Tokina 11-16mm Wide angle lens, Sea&sea YS-D1 Strobos(x2), Aquatica housing, 8in Dome f/9, 1/60, ISO400, 11mm



A Carley float life raft crushed under HMS Prince of Wales. Canon 550d, Tokina 11-16mm Wide angle lens, Sea&sea YS-D1 Strobos(x2), Aquatica housing, 8in Dome f/7.1, 1/30, ISO800, 11mm

number of technical divers began to visit the wreck. These group's interests ranged from history to photography and even technical questions into the sinking along with a steady stream of divers taking the opportunity to show their respect and replace the White Ensigns which have been damaged or even drifted away over the years.

I was offered the chance to take part in an expedition this year to dive the Repulse and Prince of Wales and having only recently taken up underwater photography (I bought my Aquatica housing in late 2012) my mind was immediately filled with visions of award winning pictures of 15 inch guns in crystal clear visibility. Diving mainly in the UK my opportunities for large scale pictures had been limited to two trips to Malta, one of which suffered with bad weather and associated poor visibility so I was keen to try something new and booked myself a place. Shortly before the trip in

May 2014 my friend and partner in crime Adam, who is a member of the Royal Naval Reserve Diving Branch, contacted me and asked if I'd help him replace the Ensign on the Repulse, how could I refuse?

As anyone who travels to dive will know getting equipment where you need it to be is a challenge, add a camera and housing into the mix and it immediately becomes even more complicated. To make matters worse we wouldn't just be taking standard SCUBA equipment, we'd need to take equipment for mixed gas diving at depth; the Repulse lies on her port side with the highest point of her hull at 35m, the seabed is at 58m, while the Prince of Wales is deeper again with the seabed at 68m and the shallowest point at almost 50m. The airline we chose has a standard weight limit of 23kg, and a rebreather in a bag weighs almost exactly 23kg! Excess baggage allowed us another

bag each but with wetsuit, regulators for emergency bailout cylinders and all the other necessities of technical diving there was no room left for the camera equipment, there wasn't even any room for clothes. We found a reprieve in the allowance of 23kg for carry on as long as the bag was the correct size. Packing a housing, strobes, camera, lenses and dome port into a carry on sized bag presented an interesting puzzle and left me with only my laptop bag for both my laptop and clothing for the 10 day trip, 3 t-shirts would be enough surely?

With the wrecks almost 60 miles offshore the initial 12 hour flight was not the end of our travels. Joining the dive boat on a Sunday morning we would travel for over 24 hours and arrive on site for the first dive at around 1000 on Monday morning. Arriving on the site of HMS Repulse the first thing that struck us was the smell; recent salvage activity has damaged the hull and a steady trickle of fuel oil

was bubbling to the surface creating a thin slick on the surface many hundreds of meters long. Watching the shotline snake down into the water the visibility looked phenomenal and we were all keen to get in the water and see the wreck.

The first shock was the current. Although we had been warned that it was strong no one was really expecting to be dragging themselves down the line with both hands, fortunately it subsided at around 20m and we were able to take a more relaxed descent to the wreck which is where we got our second shock. Hovering over and around the wreck was a cloud of silt stirred up by the current and my anticipated 20-30m of visibility was a murky 5 or 6m. Great in the UK, not quite what you expect in the South China Sea!

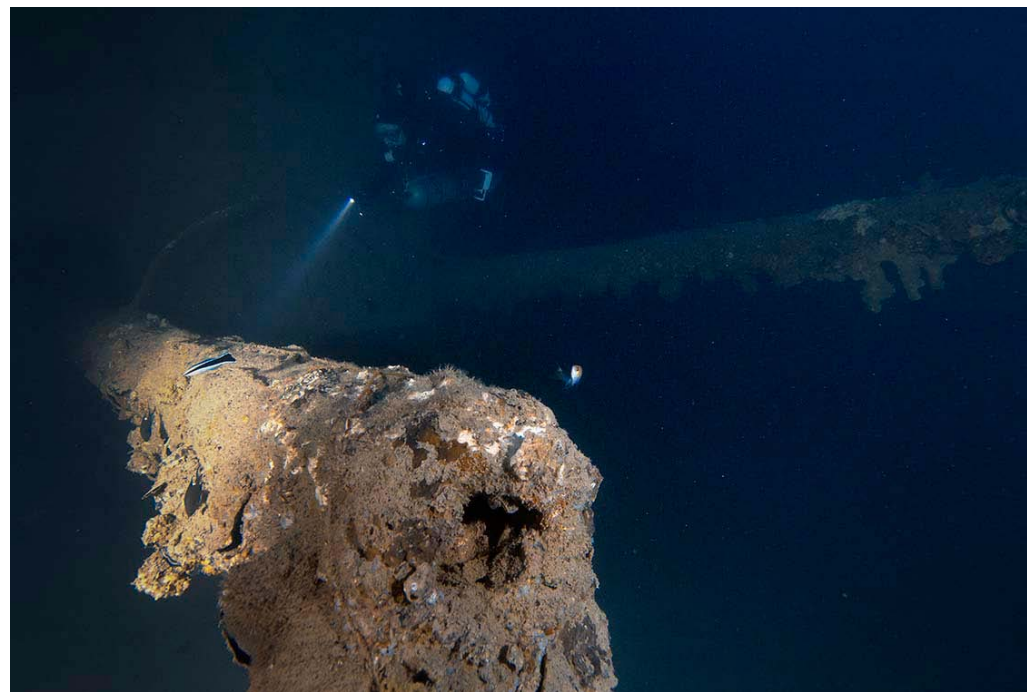
I looked in dismay at the hazy outline of Adam a few meters away and chanced a peek through my viewfinder, perhaps the camera would magically remove the fog bank that engulfed us? Rather predictably all I saw was a small hazy diver with a hint of wreck behind him. I was less than impressed. One of the benefits of a rebreather is the ability to talk, and be understood, in the water and both myself and Adam made our views abundantly clear to one another

We dropped over the edge of the wreck and a poor situation became

rapidly worse. At 58m not only had the visibility dropped to 3m but the silt above was cutting out most of the light and it was dark. Very dark. Inside my Aquatica housing rested a Canon 550D with a Tokina 11-16mm wide angle lens behind an 8" dome, the best tools I had available to tackle my planned shots of big guns, big props and anything else "big". As we swam forward along the wreck I began to experiment, seeing what, if anything, I could achieve in these conditions with the help of my two YS-D1 strobes. As my heart wasn't really in it the predictable answer was "not a lot".

We finned past the 15" guns and from the muzzle couldn't make out any more than a diver's torch at the turret, a couple of test shots confirmed that there would be no grand panoramic shot of a diver studying some of the biggest guns ever used by the Royal Navy. Reaching the bow provided yet more disappointment as I knelt on the seabed expecting to see the silhouette of the ship towering above me, Adam hovering beside it to give a sense of scale. I could see it all my head, unfortunately all my camera could see was a dark haze surrounded by a slightly lighter haze.

We returned to the shotline and made our way to the surface. Having spent 45 minutes on the bottom we were now committed to sit in the



Adam swims past the 5.25" Guns which failed to protect HMS Prince of Wales from the Japanese. Canon 550d, Tokina 11-16mm Wide angle lens, Sea&sea YS-D1 Strobes(x2), Aquatica housing, 8in Dome f/7.1, 1/30, ISO800, 11mm

raging current for at least another hour. As you may imagine this did nothing to improve my mood and until I'd been back on the boat for a while and eaten some of the excellent Thai food that was provided it was best for all concerned that I just sit and stew for a while.

As we began to prepare for the second dive I reviewed what I'd seen and what I could now reasonably expect to achieve, I also watched and felt quite sorry for Dave, a fellow photographer, who was emptying

water out of his flooded strobe. It was true that the gun and bow shots were almost certainly not achievable, however the visibility on top of the wreck was better and seemed to improve throughout the dive so there could be some scope for some decent pictures of the Ensign being raised and while we were along the bottom I'd seen some interesting smaller features which I could play with.

The second dive was much the same as the first only instead of heading to the bow we went aft to

Adam swims along the prop shaft of HMS Repulse prior to attaching the Ensign. The propeller was removed some time ago. Canon 550d, Tokina 11-16mm Wide angle lens, Sea&sea YS-D1 Strokes(x2), Aquatica housing, 8in Dome f/10, 1/30, ISO800, 11mm



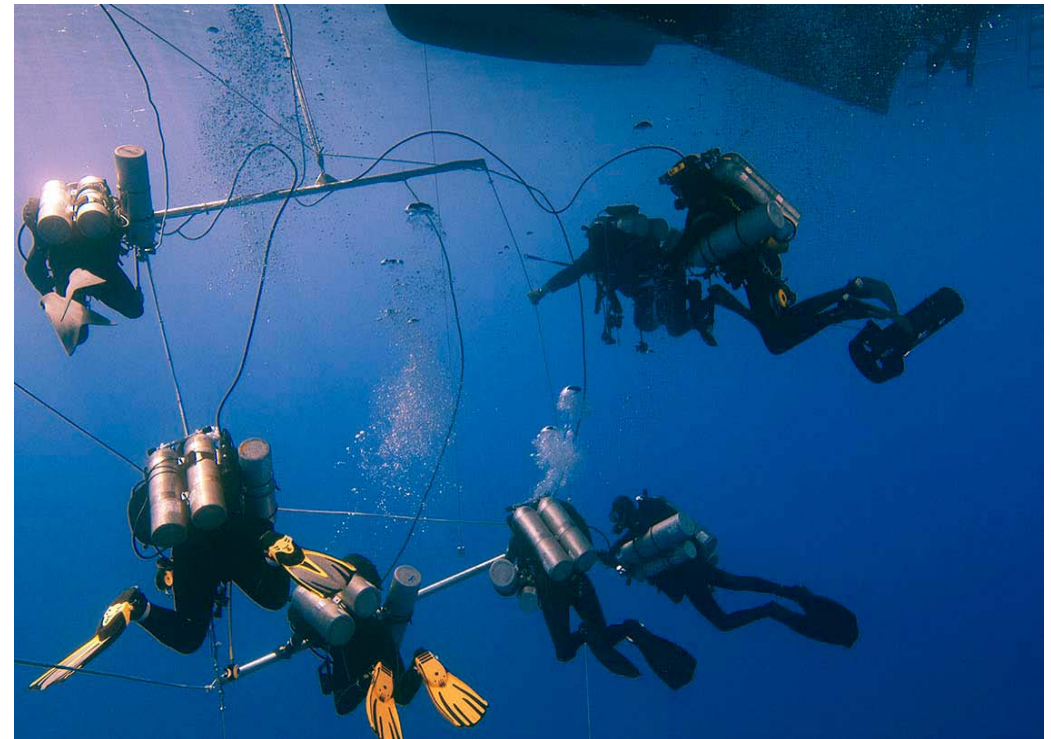
look at the prop shafts and rudder (the props themselves have all been salvaged). We spent the dive looking at the damage caused by the recent salvage operation and making a plan for the rigging of the Ensign which due to the poor visibility we had decided to do the next morning.

The plan was to collect a lot of pictures showing the deployment and then get some “Arty” shots once it was in place, fluttering majestically in the current. Heading the 100m aft from the shot line we reached the prop shafts and took some time to take pictures of them before Adam got to work. Within 20 minutes the buoy was released and the ensign pulled clear of its bag and with a little encouragement to release a few twists it did indeed begin to flutter majestically in the current!

I went to an excellent presentation on deep wreck photography at the London International Dive show last year where the top tips of “turn up your ISO” and “turn down your shutter speed” were given and so I went to

work set at ISO800 and 1/30ths with the strobes set at a very low power to pick out nearby colour which seemed to work quite well. As the trip went on and the visibility improved I was able to reduce this to ISO400 but kept the long exposure in all but a few cases.

In the middle of the week we carried out two dives on the Prince of Wales and if Repulse was dark she was positively black. Completely capsized the only way to see anything of interest is to get under the inverted deck. We were rewarded with the truly evocative sight of trapped and crushed Carley float life-rafts which stood



With 12 divers doing anything up to 2 hours of decompression it often got crowded on the trapeze.. Canon 550d, Tokina 11-16mm Wide angle lens, Sea&sea YS-D1 Strokes(x2), Aquatica housing, 8in Dome f/9, 1/30, ISO400, 11mm

out against the silt and steel of the wreck and fortunately for me were big enough to fill my frame while the silt was light enough that the strobes cut through the darkness with very little back scatter. It goes without saying that there was to be no large scale images of the Prince of Wales.

Returning to the Repulse for a final dive I took the opportunity to capture some images of the smaller features I had seen on the first dive; an imploded 4 inch shell casing

and voice pipes near the mast. The current had dropped over the week and I was amazed by the improved visibility along the top of the wreck as we made our way back towards the shotline after an hour on the bottom. I followed Adam up the line and at around 15m above the wreck turned to take one last look. Beneath me, crystal clear, was the damage caused by the first torpedo strike, all it needed was a diver in the lower right corner peering in to give a sense of scale,



With 12 divers doing anything up to 2 hours of decompression it often got crowded on the trapeze. On this occasion Louise found my camera appearing in front of her from above.. Canon 550d, Tokina 11-16mm Wide angle lens, Sea&sea YS-D1 Strobes(x2), Aquatica housing, 8in Dome f/9, 1/30, ISO400, 11mm

but the only other diver was already a dozen meters above me and after an hour at 50m, with nearly 2 hours of decompression already to do, asking him to go back down would be above and beyond the call of duty. I took the picture anyway, but of course I know there's something missing.

I didn't get my large scale pictures of guns and props where a more experienced or more dedicated photographer may have done. But what I did achieve is to get a number of images I was happy with in

conditions that were neither what I'd hoped for or even had any cause to expect. My pictures have been seen by more people than I could ever have hoped, been featured on the Royal Navy's web site and now they are appearing here. Not bad for someone who a year and a half ago had never taken a picture under water.

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