



**Q&A: GEORGINA MILLER**

THE CHAMPION FREEDIVER  
TALKS BREATH-HOLD,  
WHALES AND CORNWALL

**TECH: THE AEGEAN SEA**

YANA STASHKEVICH DIVES  
THE DEEPER WRECKS OFF  
THE GREEK COASTLINE

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# *Diving* GALLIPOLI

Janez Kranjc and Ivana Orlovic explore the  
**World War One shipwrecks**  
lying off Turkey



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**W**hile I am not a stranger to serene Greek resorts with blue clear waters having ticked off quite a few of the 178 recreational dive sites, Greece never really made it to the top of my 'destination for deep wrecks hunting' list. Apart from the infamous Titanic's sister ship, the HMHS Britannic, of course. Not until recently anyway, when I was invited to join a project team to document and confirm the identities of lesser-known Aegean wrecks.

With the Aegean Sea alone covering over 214,000 sq km, it's no surprise it is hiding hundreds of wrecks in technical diving range from various times throughout history, still waiting to be formally identified. Diving with purpose. That resonated with me. Naturally, I was eager to get involved and explore.

### Vickers Wellington (Sifnos Island)

Planes underwater have always had a special appeal for me. There is something contradictory about a machine designed for the skies being at the bottom of the sea. When I was invited to dive the wreck of one of the most-significant combat aircraft in British history, a Vickers Wellington (Type 466 Wellington GR Mark XIII, to be precise), I was thrilled. It was discovered in 2014 and we were the second group of four divers to document the wreck, in October 2023.

During the four-hour ferry journey from Athens, I was busy marking potential points of interest on the wreck's drawing. Most World War Two wrecks are a reminder of how fragile human life can be, the Vickers Wellington on the contrary captures an incredible survival story. The crew skillfully ditched the aircraft after being shot down and were rescued by the locals.





# THE HIDDEN GEMS

## *of the Aegean Sea*

Yana Stashkevich heads for Greece to take part in some deep wreck identification dives, including a Wellington bomber, a paddle steamer, and a magnificent liner

Photographs by Yana Stashkevich / as credited

It is believed to be the best-preserved airplane wreck of its class, which promised an exciting dive. A staggering 11,500 aircrafts were produced after 1930.

I marked the escape hatch on the wreck plan. It should be easy to find as the linen covering the lattice structure of an aircraft (making it exceptionally lightweight and enabling its payload capacity) was unlikely to have survived 81 years underwater. I continued reading. 'British long range medium bomber' – so it definitely has twin engines. ▶



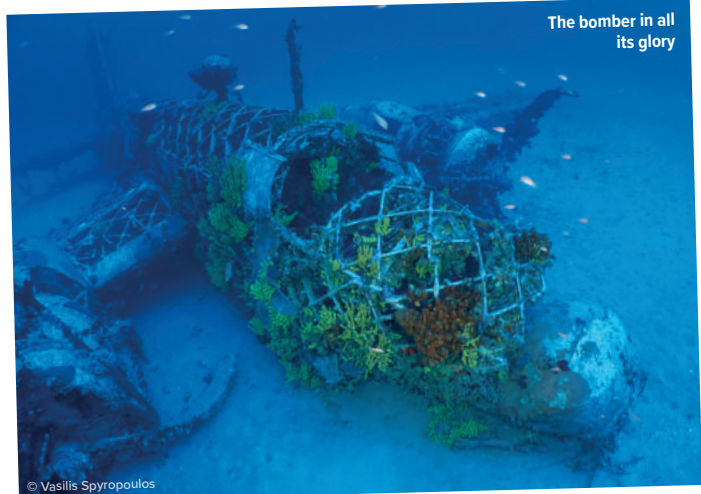
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The bomber in all  
its glory



© Vasilis Spyropoulos

19.69 metres in length and with a wingspan of 26.27 metres - I was confident, with the right conditions, we could accomplish the mission in one to two dives.

On our first diving day, the weather couldn't have been more perfect. On the descent, from 40m, I could clearly see the unmistakable iconically shaped aircraft structure, resting on the seabed at 74m, covered in soft coral and colourful marine life, in celebration of all six crew members escaping unharmed.

The propellers of the plane are distorted indicating the blades were probably still spinning when the aircraft hit the water. The radar and antenna are still attached on the upper section, and all cabin instruments are clearly visible.

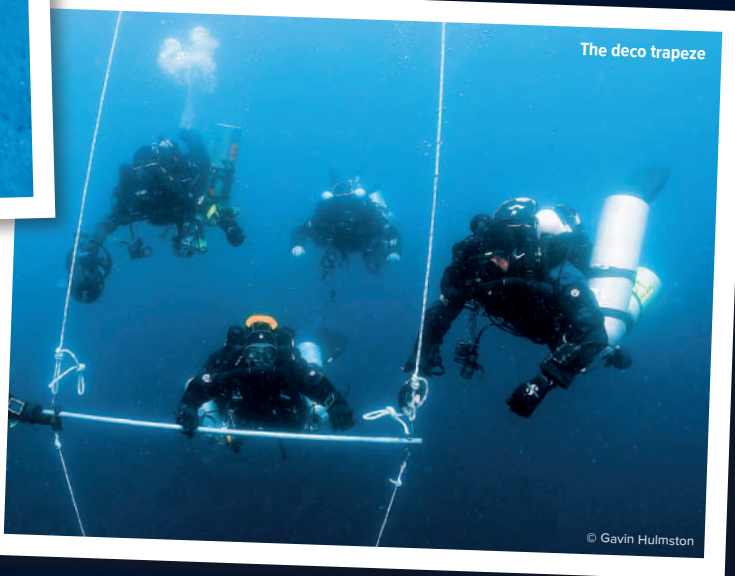
I continued around the plane. The nose turret with both Browning guns is faced down. It is a truly enthralling wreck. We swam around it again, this time taking pictures and started the ascent after 30 minutes. I watched the geodesic structure disappear into the darkness, waiting patiently to be dived again sometime soon.

### SS Burdigala (S/S Kaiser Friedrich) between Kea and Makronissos islands)

Upon the return to our dive base near Athens, I couldn't leave Greece without diving the SS Burdigala at least once. To call SS Burdigala 'a classic Britannic warm-up dive' does not give it enough credit. It is the second largest wreck in

“ Peering through the saloon opening I was searching for clues in a ghostly room half buried in undisturbed silt, wondering what treasures it may hold ”

The deco trapeze



© Gavin Hulmston

the Greek Seas, identified in 2008, and alone warrants a trip to the Aegean for multiple exploratory dives.

Planning the dive, I was torn between a mission to photograph the iconic knife-edge bow or the impressive triple propellers spanning over six metres. The port propeller is missing one blade, and the starboard side propeller is buried in sand. At 183 metres long, doing both bow and stern, even on a DPV, at 76 metres would have been too rushed. I opted for the former.

This luxury liner was designed to break the speed record, but it never did. Due to strong currents, I wasn't going to break any DPV records either and slowly made my way along the deck observing impressive features partly covered in fishing nets. The SS Burdigala hit a mine and sank on 14 November 1916. Only two nautical miles away and five days later, the same submarine U-73 caused the sinking of the Britannic on 21 November 1916.

The SS Burdigala sank in less than 35 minutes after water rushed into the front of the engine's second boiler room, and later the ship was broken in half by a second explosion. Approaching the point of the split, the sheer size of the wreck made me feel insignificant and small. I had to fight the temptation to explore inside, the lure of multiple visible and accessible decks almost irresistible. Definitely a reason to come back again (with appropriate overhead reels that I didn't have with me at the time). ▶

The deep-water wrecks  
are in remarkable  
condition





### HMS Ermine (Strymonic Bay)

While the excitement after the first tech diving trip hadn't worn off, six months later in April 2023 I was on my way to join the team on another project. It's not often you get a chance to dive a 1917 World War One wreck laying at 63m that has only been dived once before. Especially with a mission to confirm its identity.

Our dive base in the North of Greece in Stratoni was a perfect location for reaching the bay. In contrast to the crystal-clear blue waters of the Aegean, the underwater conditions were silty and murky (due to rivers flowing into the bay). This created a comfortably familiar environment for many British divers, and the perfect conditions for creating an eerie atmosphere and surreal feeling for diving a wreck left untouched for 107 years on the seabed.

Completely encrusted by marine life and silt, HMS Ermine still has a very distinct ship structure. Camouflaged anchors seamlessly blend into an unfriendly environment and resemble slightly melted wax objects that can only be recognised from a very close range. Portholes, still intact, are guarded by a not particularly friendly local resident – a five-metre-long conger eel. The upright funnel has survived over a century underwater even after other parts of the superstructure have completely vanished.

While some wooden wrecks stay better preserved underwater, the wooden decking of HMS Ermine has collapsed. The opening provided a glimpse into life onboard this troopship and revealed the plaque confirming the identity of the ship – it was undoubtedly the HMS Ermine, built in 1912.

HMS Ermine hit a mine laid by the German submarine UC-23 on the way from the port of Stavros to Thessaloniki. Twenty-four people lost their lives. Some accounts state over 60 casualties due to the ship sinking in less than three minutes, which didn't leave enough time for the lifeboats to escape the created funnel. Some bodies have never been recovered. The thought of this made me shiver and stop for a minute.

Peering through the saloon opening I was searching for clues in a ghostly room half buried in undisturbed silt, wondering what treasures it may hold. I remember a witness account story from 1919 stating that one of the officers had lost his life while he was attempting to recover his golden watch from his cabin. Is there a chance it is still there? Unfortunately, for safety reasons, we will never be able to explore inside.

### Paddle steamer Patris (Bay of Koundouros, Kea)

Another wreck that caught my eye was the paddle steamer Patris. This wreck could have easily been a perfect prop for a Pirates of the Mediterranean sequel if they were to film it



Name plates aid identification



Marine life and silt can disguise parts of the Ermine

- not the 1860 ship that sank after hitting a known reef in 1868. I was captivated. The unmistakable steam ship wheel. Most blades are still intact, covered in old, rugged fishing nets. Glimpses of sunlight breaking through 33m of water, bringing a 66-metre-long and 8.5-metre-wide wreck to life.

What has always fascinated me about wrecks is that feeling of going back in time and almost literally touching history. Patris was one of the most-modern ships in the 19th century and the oldest wreck I have dived. It could carry 400 passengers, crew, and additional goods.

This 155-year-old wreck is surprisingly well preserved (apart from a broken hull) and makes a perfect check-out dive sitting at 33-55m of water, split into two parts.

Seeing a resident elephant seal leisurely hovering near the reef most afternoons, makes it overall a 'very lovely dive'.

Another Patris-class ship is resting at a depth of 65m. Embraced by darkness with striking, almost fluorescent, when illuminated by the torches, marine growth, is a very different but equally intriguing dive within easy reach of Athens. At my deco stop, I was already planning my next trip to Greece. ■