

wrecks

The propeller of the *Arturo Volpe* wreck (right); The author exploring wrecks in the Ionian Sea (below)

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In the waters of the Strait of Messina and the Grecanica Area in Calabria, Italy, there are many shipwrecks and submerged artefacts dating from ancient to modern times, with more still to be found. Andrea Murdock Alpini takes us on a journey of discovery to several wreck sites in the area and their history, as well as a beautiful underwater cave.



COURTESY OF ANDREA MURDOCK ALPINI, PHY DIVING EQUIPMENT



ALESSANDRO PAGANO, PHY DIVING EQUIPMENT

An Italian Wreck Valley

The Strait of Messina & the Grecanica Area

The water is warm and clear. The landscape is barren. The sun is high above the horizon. The blue waters of the Strait of Messina await technical divers eager to discover new sites. Stories of the Strait's endless stretches of sand, rocks, legendary shoals of

fish and many shipwrecks are waiting to be told. It is a sea of discovery.

The Strait of Messina

The dive sites of La Secca dei Francesi (the French Shoal), the Scalone, the *Valfiorita* and the *Arturo Volpe* wrecks

and the beautiful walls of Scilla are lost in the vastness of the ultramarine blue sea. Here, gorgonians sway in the current like blades of grass in a prairie.

Alvah. Of the many dive sites in the Strait, there is one that has always

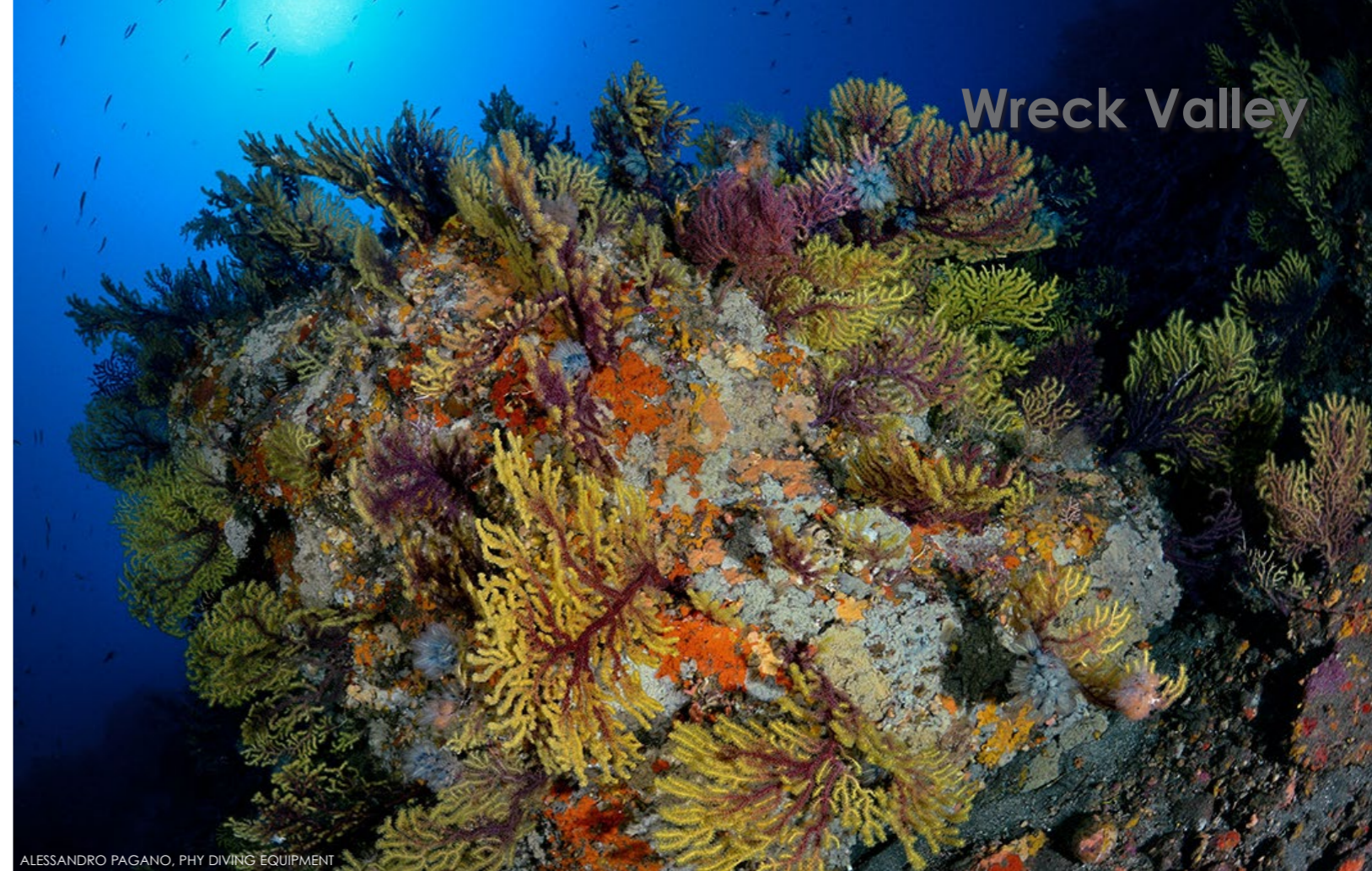
fascinated me more than the others. When I go solo, the site I love to dive is the wreck of the *Alvah* at Cannitello.

The current at the mouth of the Strait of Messina is powerful but also tame, if you know how to respect and understand it. Sometimes, I think





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Wreck Valley

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Rocky landscape on the Ionian coast in Calabria (above); Gorgonian sea fans on the deep reef at Scilla (right)



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that diving is more a mental thing than a technical one. I have learnt to observe the behaviour of the fish to understand the current.

Sometimes, I dive without a torch and become enveloped in the darkness of the wreck. At first glance, I see nothing; then, shades of chiaroscuro begin to appear, like a cat on a starry night. As one approaches, the wreck naturally takes shape and colour.

Glauco Cave. The cave of Glauco is a beautiful dive site. I discovered it while plumbing the depths from the *Raffio*, my zodiac, the boat I use for exploration and underwater research. This dive site is a buried harbour where one can find ancient Roman, British Admiralty and 16th and 19th-century anchors. It is a true underwater archaeological site.

Here, I found a beautiful cliff that went from 60m to 27m deep. I never imagined that I would find such a

marvel. The gorgonian sea fans were red and small at first; then, at around 60m, they became two-toned and thick. A sea prairie is what this place looked like.

The current rocked me, changing in strength from time to time. As I soared around 50m, I found an ancient Roman anchor. It was huge—at least two metres long. Who knows what great ancient ship had lost it.

Proceeding with my dive, I ascended to 30m in search of the cave. Illuminating the dark hole with my torch, the marvellous discovery was revealed. The cave was white and golden yellow, speckled with grey. Feather duster worms here resembled palm trees, sponges invaded every rock and soft corals appeared as if they were works of art by Salvador Dalí. Inside this space, I felt as if I was in a *wunderkammer*—a room of wonders. I never wanted to leave. It was a unique and beautiful dive.

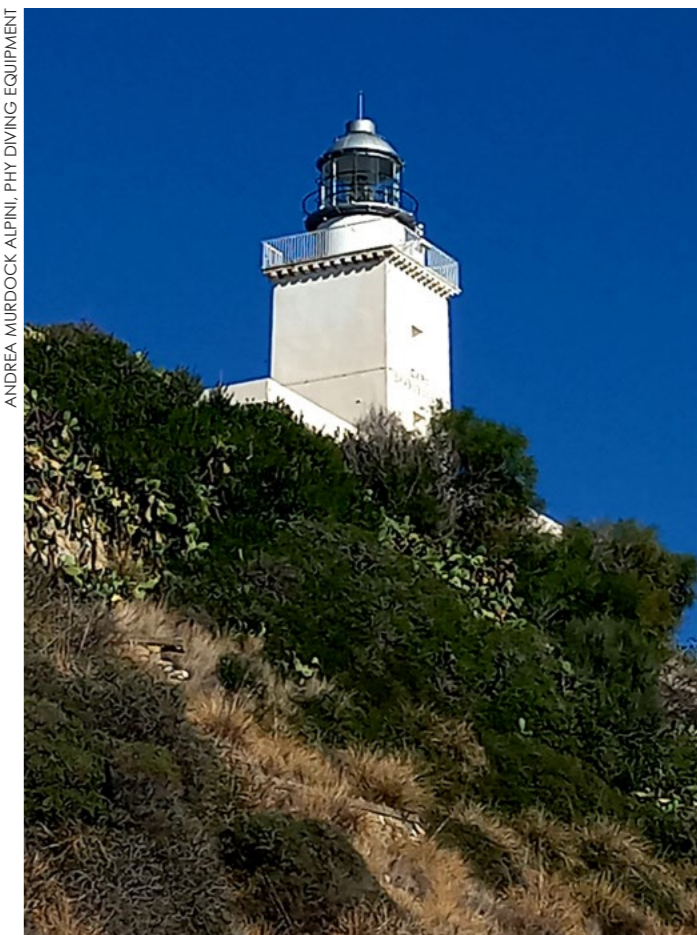
The Grecanic Wreck Valley

Today, I would be leaving the Strait of Messina aboard the *Raffio*. On the way to my destination, the wind would change twice, shifting first at the lighthouse of Capo delle Armi. Around this area, many ships sank during the two World Wars, including the WWI steamer *Cordova*.

Cordova. This ship flew the Italian flag on behalf of the Italian shipping company Lloyd Società Anonima di Navigazione, based in Genoa, and was converted into a hospital ship in 1916. On 4 July 1918, the Italian steamer was torpedoed near Capo delle Armi by the German submarine UC-52, commanded by Hellmuth von Doemming. The ship had left Karachi under the command of Captain Gil Di Borgia Adolfo and was heading for Sicily.

Passing the lighthouse and its beautiful cliffs, I steered the bow of the

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Capo Spartivento Calabro Lighthouse

Anchor spare parts on the *Valfiorita* wreck

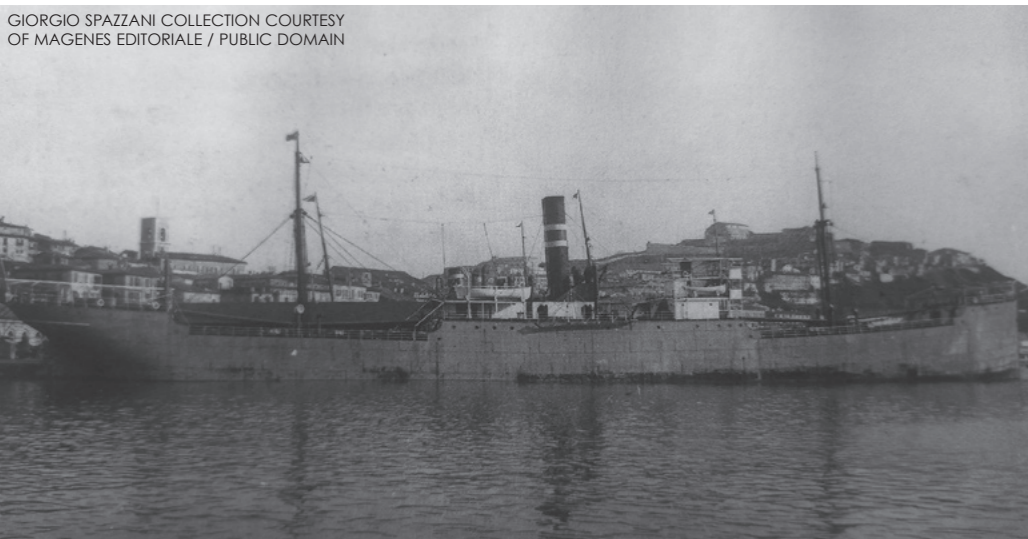


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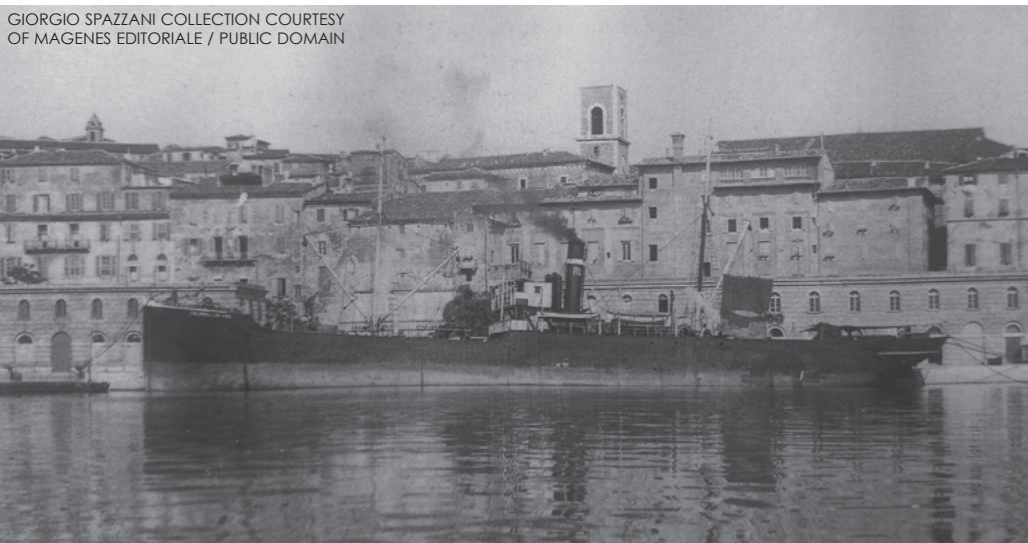


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School of anthias on the *Bosforo* wreck (above). Riveted panel with a steam boiler in the background on the *Bergamo* wreck (top left). The steamship *Dandolo* was sunk on 28 July 1916 by the German U-boat *U-35* (far left); The steamship *Colomba Lofaro* was sunk in March 1941 by the British submarine *HMS Triumph* (bottom left); The author studying documents for research in preparation for exploratory dives to potential wreck sites (right).

rying a cargo of sulphur. Today, the wreck lies on the submerged reef of Melito Porto Salvo at a depth of 50m.

Colomba Lofaro. A similar fate befell a ship belonging to an owner from Torre del Greco (Naples) on the same day. He had named the ship after his mother, *Colomba Lofaro*. The British submarine *HMS Triumph*, which sank the *Marzamemi*, also sank the steamer *Colomba Lofaro* on its way from Catania to Crotone. This shipwreck is located very close to shore.

Ringulv. Another ship that disappeared not too far from this point is the Norwegian cargo vessel *Ringulv*, commissioned by a Greek shipowner. The steamer changed hands several times before the French Navy confiscated it from the Norwegians as war booty in 1940. Two years later, the French returned it to the Norwegians, but this time, it was the Germans who seized

it as war booty under the name *Norda*. In 1943, on 14 June to be precise, the British submarine *HMS United* sank the ship off the coast of Capo delle Armi.

I had done enough scanning for today and gotten excellent results. It was now time to return to dock. Tomorrow, I would continue to work in other areas.

The next day, the *Raffio* was ready to continue the search. This time, I resumed my preliminary studies, sketches and drafts that I had made before departing.

Dandolo. Off the coast of the Spartivento Lighthouse, I remembered that the German submarine *U-35* had torpedoed the Italian cargo ship *Dandolo*, launched in 1906. With a gross tonnage of 5,000, it was an awesome 100m giant that sank somewhere not too far from here. There are few clues to its sinking.

Around the area of the Spartivento Lighthouse, the nautical charts show many

Raffio towards the town of Saline Joniche. This area has plenty of shipwrecks. Aside from the *Cordova*, other ships have sunk here at depths of between 50m and 200m.

Minna Schuldt. The cargo ship *Minna Schuldt* was built at the Flensburg shipyards in 1891. Later, its name was changed to *Marzamemi*, sailing under the Italian flag in 1934. Three successive Italian shipowners possessed the ship until the day it was torpedoed by a British submarine while car-

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traces of wrecks. The work of my research has been to remove from the list of wrecks many ships that sank much further from where they were expected.

Sebastiano Bianchi. This was the case of the *Sebastiano Bianchi*, which sank after a collision with a mine laid by the British submarine HMS *Truant*. The ship disappeared on 13 December 1940. It lies at a depth of about 1,000m, ten miles from the lighthouse, far from shore.

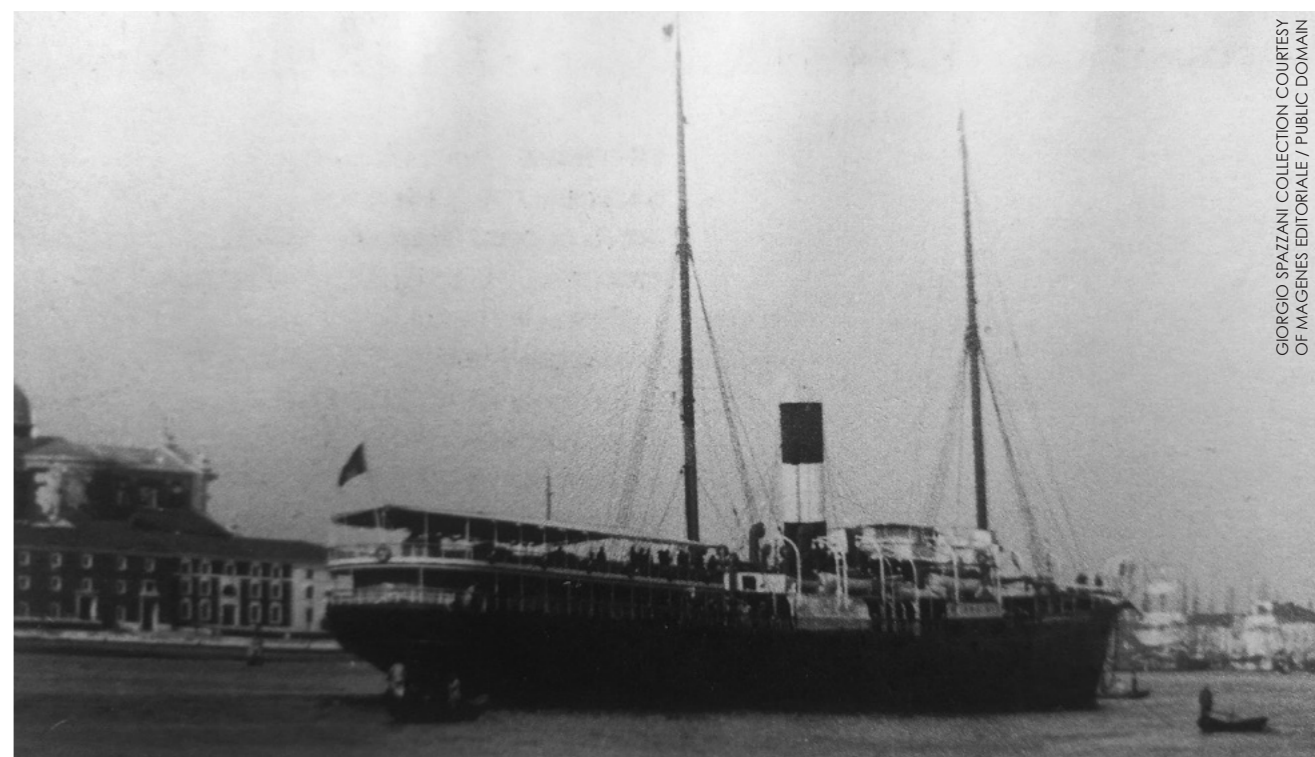
Zeila. On the same route (a few miles further on land) is the wreck of the tanker *Zeila*. It was on 23 March 1943 when the British submarine HMS *Unison* torpedoed the *Zeila* four miles off Spartivento. The ship had been launched in Holland in 1898 under



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the name of *Haliotis*. It was just under 2,000 gross tonnes and just over 70m in length.

Città di Bergamo. Moving towards land, I reached the coordinates 37° 53' 33'' N 16° 05' 42'' E. There, I found the remains of the ship *Città di*



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Anti-aircraft machine gun cannon on the bow (top left) and artefacts (top right) on the *Bosforo* wreck. The steamship *Bosforo* was sunk on 12 January 1918 by the Austrian Imperial U-boat *U-28*, with 36 casualties (above). The steamship *Sebastiano Bianchi* sank after hitting a mine laid by British vessel HMS *Truant* (left).

Bergamo, also lost during World War II. On 14 March 1943 at 12:08, it sank after being torpedoed by the British submarine HMS *Unbending*.

Bosforo. During the First World War, the ship *Bosforo* also sank in this stretch of sea. Today, the wreck is protected under histori-



Diver on the wreck of the steamship *Torino* (right and below), which participated in Sbarco dei Mille di Garibaldi (Expedition of the Thousand) in 1860



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cal preservation laws of the Underwater Archaeological Superintendence of the Calabria Region.

The ship lies at a depth of 63m. It was broken into three sections after being hit by an explosion on 12 January 1918. It was the Austro-Hungarian submarine U-28, under the command of Zdenko Hudeček, that sealed the vessel's fate and caused it to explode. Nine crew members and 27 passengers died in the collapse.

The Italian steamer, built in 1878 in Glasgow, Scotland, was travelling from Naples to Greece. At the outbreak of

war, the *Bosforo* was part of the Sitmar fleet of the Società Italiana Servizi Marittimi (Italian Maritime Transport Company).

While diving on the wreck, I noticed that despite its age, the period character of the ship had not aged. The wreck was graceful in all its forms. The stern had collapsed due to its impact on the seabed. Nevertheless, one can clearly see the armament installed on board at the outbreak of the war. The *Bosforo* was equipped as an armed merchant vessel, which, from the enemy's point of view, justified its sinking during the war.



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The steamship *Marzamemi* sank on 5 March 1941 by the British submarine HMS *Triumph*.

The middle of the ship was still easily recognisable, with its gunnels, rows of portholes and then its beautiful boilers. The bow, on the other hand, was much flatter.

This wreck is truly unique. It deserves many dives to be fully appreciated. Its details range from macro to micro in scale. Everywhere I looked, I was fascinated by all its submerged beauty.

Many more wrecks are waiting for me out there. There is still a lot to do. The sea along the Ionian coast of Calabria is an incredible spot. Aboard the *Raffio*, the Germanica Wreck Valley is now open to the technical diving community. Wrecks at various depths are waiting to be explored by divers from all over the world. With breathtaking scenery and warm, clear waters, it is truly an Italian para-

dise in the Mediterranean Sea. I will be waiting aboard the *Raffio* to dive with you in this fantastic sea. □

Andrea Murdock Alpini is a TDI and PSAI technical trimix and advanced wreck-overhead instructor trainer based in Italy. He is fascinated by deep wrecks, historical research, decompression studies, caves, filmmaking and writing. In June 2024, he was awarded the Golden Trident as a scuba explorer and researcher. Andrea holds a Master's degree in Architecture and an MBA in Economics for the Arts. He is also the founder of PHY Diving Equipment. His life revolves around teaching

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scuba diving, leading expeditions, developing gear and writing essays on his philosophy of wreck and cave diving. He has published several books, including Deep Blue: Storie di Relitti e Luoghi Insoliti in 2018, Immersioni Selvagge in 2022, Andrea Doria: Un Lembo di Patria in 2023, and Nomade del Profondo in 2024, which features stories about wrecks and cave and mine diving, as well as interviews with three American pioneers of contemporary scuba diving. He leads excursions to the deep wrecks of southern Italy on board his zodiac boat, the Raffio. For more information, please visit: wreckdiving.it