

An underwater photograph of a vibrant coral reef. The scene is dominated by large, branching red coral structures that appear to be sea fans or similar soft coral. The water is a clear, deep blue, and numerous small, dark fish are scattered throughout the background, some swimming in schools. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture and color of the coral.

*The Mediterranean's*

# Côte d'Azur

— *Where It All Began*

Text and photos by Kurt Amsler

Translation by Peter Symes

Edited by Catherine GS Lim



Coming full circle. It all started in the Med. It was here in the 1930's and 40's that the likes of Hans Hass, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, Frederic Dumas and Phillip Tailliez pioneered scuba diving as we came to know it. Erstwhile the obvious choice for dive travelers once the Red Sea and even more exotic destinations became accessible to a wider audience, it fell somewhat out of favor. But now, it's back on the map, the fish are back and so are the divers. Kurt Amsler gives us the lowdown on diving in what is now his backyard.

Wind the clock back to 1937, and we will find a young man from Austria by the name of Hans Hass spending his holiday after graduating from high school in the little town of Juan-les-Pins on the French Riviera. It was here he observed an

Englishman hunting for fish under-

water which seeded the inspiration that would later make him one of the greatest diving pioneers. It was also in this region that three Frenchmen from Marseilles—Jacques Cousteau, Frederic Dumas and Phillip Tailliez—who later came to be known as the “The Three Mus-



Historical photo of Hans Hass at Juan-Les-Pins, France

Diver at Cape Dramont, Esterel, Côte d'Azur (above); The scenic seaside at Bandol along the Côte d'Azur (top right). PREVIOUS PAGE: Red starfish on reef





Estérel, Côte d'Azur (left); Historical photo of Émile Gagnan with the first Aqua-Lung, 1943 (above); French village along the Côte d'Azur (right)

children opening a Christmas package who were quite as excited as we were when we unwrapped this first 'Aqua Lung'. If this piece of kit was working as intended it would mean a revolution in the diving community.

"We procured a set of three medium-sized cylinders with compressed air, which were connected to a regulator the

size of an alarm clock. The regulator was fitted with two hoses that were attached to a mouthpiece. Kitted up with this equipment strapped on the back, a waterproof mask of glass over the eyes and nose and rubber flippers, we wanted to undertake free and independent daring forays into the depths of the sea.

"We hurried to a sheltered bay where we could be safe from the prying eyes of bathers and the Italian soldiers from the occupational force. I checked the air pressure. The tanks contained compressed air with a pressure of 150 atmospheres. I could hardly contain my excitement and was eager to discuss the plan for the first test dive."

The rest, as they say, is history. Of course, many other well-known names and places along the



Jacques-Yves Cousteau with the first Aqua-Lung, 1943

keteers", first started underwater hunting before experimenting with various equipment that allowed them to breathe underwater. This was how the regulator came about.

It was here, in June 1943, that what was to become arguably the most important invention in diving was first developed and tested. Jacques Cousteau describes this event as an uplifting moment in his book, *The Silent World*:

"On the morning of said day, I went to the station in the little town of Bandol on the French Riviera and picked up a little parcel that had been sent to me express from Paris. It contained a new promising device, the result of years of struggles and dreams: It was the automatic aqualung that Emile Gagnan and I had built together. I went back to the villa Barry where my dive-buddies Philippe Tailliez and Frederic Dumas were eagerly awaiting my return. I don't think there have ever been any



Jacques-Yves Cousteau (left) with the first Aqua-Lung, in Bandol, France, 1943



Diver on wall of red gorgonian sea fans; Goby, Port Cros (right)

Côte d'Azur, closely tied to the evolution of diving and technology, which we now take for granted today, were in many cases conceived and first tested along these coastlines.

Henry Broussard and Dimitri Rebikoff developed some of the first underwater cameras and flash units in Cannes. In Marseille, Claude Wesly and Albert Falco (who later captained the research vessel Calypso) were among the first people to spend several days in an underwater habitat on the seabed. And, of course, there is the freediving legend, Jacques Mayol, who lived in Sanary.

Places like Grand Congloué, Le Dramont and Antheor are famous

for their ancient shipwrecks, while names like Port-Cros, Cavalaire, La Tour de Fondue, or Planier Island make the connoisseur divers' mouths water.

The French Riviera is also the seat of many leading brands of dive equipment: Scubapro in Antibes, AquaLung in Nice, Beuchat and Oceanic in Marseille. On the Italian side of the border, we find equally significant makes such as Mares and Cressi-Sub. The region is also a



center for skindiving, with commercial diving schools such as COMEX being based here.

For many years, the world festival of underwater images was based

Conger eels (above); Hermit crab (top left)



Common octopus (above); *Flabellina* sp nudibranch (right inset)

in Antibes/Juan les Pins before moving to nearby Marseilles. Beginning as a local event over three decades ago, this annual photographic celebration is now the world's biggest and most significant event of its kind.

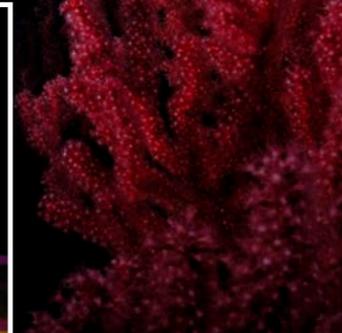
The highlights of the Côte d'Azur are, of course, the wrecks. Currently, many hundreds are known and about half of these are within reach of regular recreational divers. But there

are so many other highlights for a diving vacation on the Côte d'Azur.

### Profitez de la vie! —Enjoy life!

Surely the underwater world off the coast of southern France now looks quite different from the time the aforementioned pioneers went on their first exploratory forays into the blue realm. But for those who say that the Mediterranean has nothing more to offer, think again. Granted, you have to know the good places to experience diving adventures that do not get any better in tropical seas. Fortunately, there is now a very good infrastructure for divers in place with well-equipped dive centers from Marseille to Nice.

As far as the conditions go, the wind and weather can sometimes get a bit rough and the water is a few degrees colder than in a tropical lagoon. But it is precisely these factors that make diving at



the "Côte" a special experience.

### Technical diving

Diving in the Mediterranean differs from diving in the tropics in several ways. In the Mediterranean, the most beautiful regions are found at depths of between 20 and 40 meters. This depth already raises the bar with regards to the requirements of equipment and training.

In addition, a 10-liter tank (The ubiquitous Alu80 used as a standard tank size at many resorts worldwide contains 11 liters) can only take you so far. It is not really big enough. A 15-liter tank is more appropriate. Since the temperature of the Mediterranean decreases markedly with depth, a good 6mm to 7mm wetsuit is required in summer; while a dry suit comes in handy during the winter.

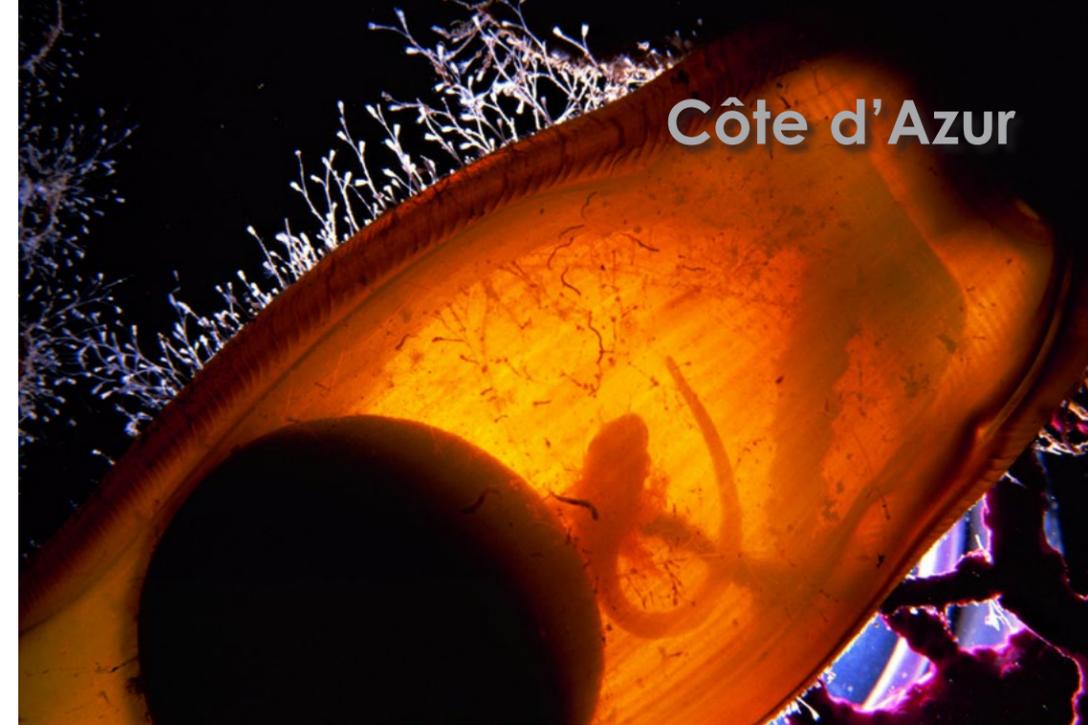
Many of the most spectacular sites and



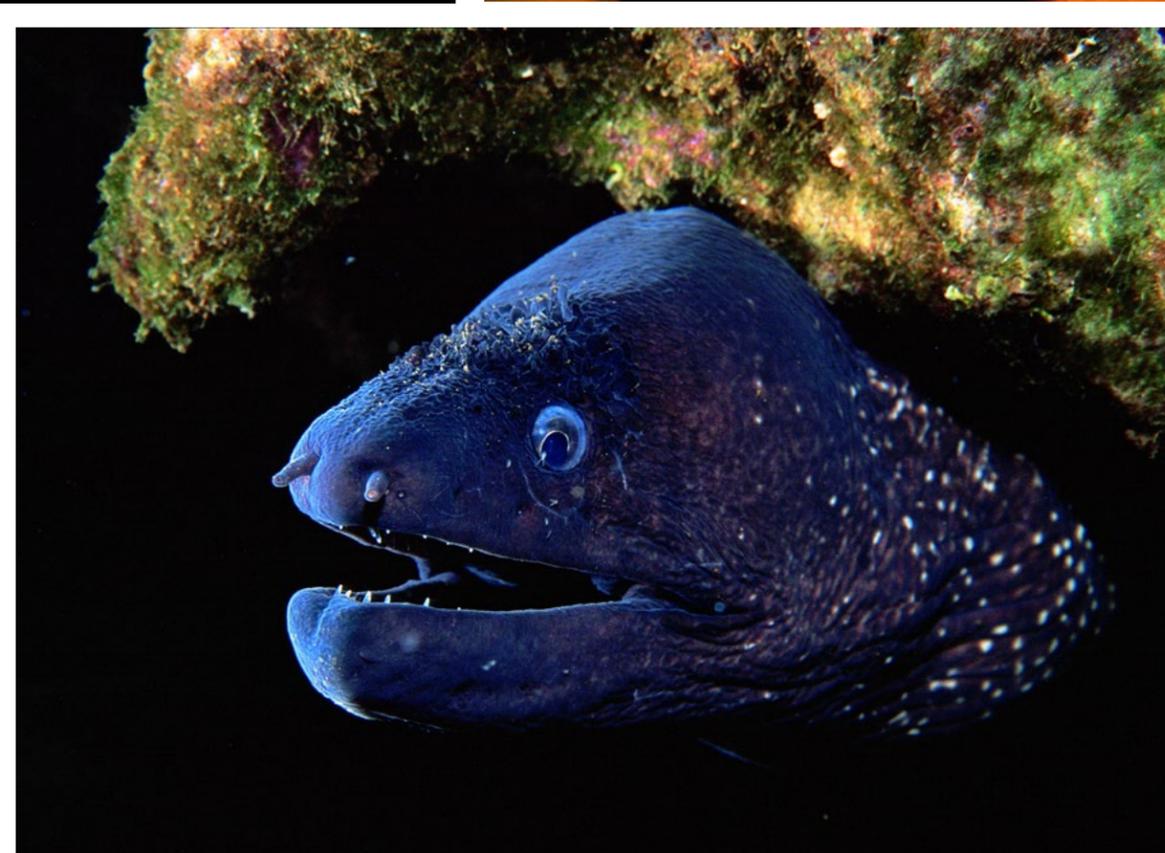
John Dory fish, or *Zeus faber*



Mola mola (above); Diver with grouper on reef of red gorgonians (top right)



Rhizostome jellyfish



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Grouper over seagrass; Fried egg jellyfish; Catshark embryo in egg case; Mediterranean moray eel

wrecks are found in open water where ascending along a down-line is required, so a higher level of diving experience and training is recommended. The dive centers in locations covered in this article provide excellent service and training. Descending through the blue from a buoy in open waters is nicknamed "parachuting" and can be quite fun, even if it only takes a short time to get down.

### Flora and fauna

The jewels of the Mediterranean are its biodiversity and colors, but

not as you know them in tropical reefs. Thanks to many protection measures and national parks in France, the abundance of fish is enormous. The colors of the underwater world are magnificent, and rocks and the wrecks are overgrown with large red and yellow gorgonians.

At this point, I would advise you to always bring a lamp of at least 20 watts, even during the day. Only with illumination is it possible to appreciate the beautiful colors on the walls of canyons, grottos and caves. In these habitats,

more sedentary creatures—such as moray eels, conger eels, scorpionfish, octopus and grouper (called Merou here in France)—can be seen.

On the island of Port Cros, for example, there are places with more than 30 of these groupers. Around the red gorgonians are

filefish, which show the same light colors as their tropical relatives. In open water, you can observe large flocks of small dark-colored swallowtails chasing mackerel and the other predatory fish.

For several years, large schools of barracuda can be found in various locations. Practically hun-

typs of red precious coral and the various tubeworms never fail to make photographers' hearts beat a little faster.

### The wrecks

Without a doubt, this coastline is a paradise for wreck divers. Just off Marseille, there are more than

dreds of schools of fish can be found at La Gabinerie, in the National Park Port Cros.

For macro fans, the Mediterranean is a never-ending, and always exhilarating hunting area. Provided you have good eyes, you can spot various kinds of nudibranchs in all colors and shapes. The yellow anemones, the white pol-



ten large vessels, including the *Liban* and airplanes from the Second World War such as the German JU-88 and a Messerschmitt 109. More can be found at the height of Toulon and around the islands of Hyerschen.

Here too lie the famous *Donor*, the *Grec* and the *Congerwreck* of Port-Cros. Interesting stories are attributed to the *Rubis* submarine wreck in St Tropez, and the *Togo*. The majority of the wrecks were sunk by sea mines during the Second World War. Virtually all the wrecks on the Côte sit on sandy ground and have become artificial reefs, completely covered with fish and giant red gorgonians. The diving centers in these areas are specialized and well-equipped for wreck diving, so it is worthwhile to make use of their

experience and services.

**Donator wreck.** The *Donator*, or *Prosper Schiaffino* as it was originally called, was built in Norway. She was 78.28m long and 11.94m wide with a draft of 5.54m. The ship was underway from Algeria to Nice with a cargo of wine, which was stored in countless barrels in the cargo hold and in large tanks on deck.

By November 1945, the clearance of mines in the Mediterranean after the war ended was far from complete. Hence, the captain ordered increased vigilance and careful navigation. The freighter

#### DONATOR FACTS:

**Type of ship:** Freighter

**Year:** 1931

**Weight:** 1,698 GT

**Nationality:** France

**Sunk:** 10 Nov 1945

**Cause:** Sea mine

**Location:** Southeast of the island of Porquerolles

**Minimum depth:** Mast 25m; structure 35m

**Maximum depth:** 51m; rear bow 48m

**Difficulty:** Advanced

**Summary:** Good

reached the Spanish coast without incident and carried on towards Toulon. Since the passage between the peninsula Giens and Porquerolles was blocked, the *Donator* had to pass on the south side of the island.

On 10 November 1945, the fully-loaded freighter was working against a strong wind known as the Mistral. At exactly one o'clock in the afternoon, disaster struck. A huge explosion rocked the ship and tore the

THIS PAGE: Scenes from the *Donator* wreck



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the wreck of the *Donator*

apparent how huge the ship really was.

The fore deck can be found a little deeper. The deck planks have long since rotted away, exposing the cargo hold below. Some scattered metal wine barrels among a scrambled mass of metal debris still remain there to this day. Diagonally across the aft deck lies a huge mast which, until a few years ago, stood up vertically to a depth of 25m. It ultimately collapsed due to corrosion and the strain of mooring ships pulling on it.

What is left of the superstructure is now more of a skeleton



bow apart. The ship had hit a sea mine, which was either set adrift or had gone unnoticed by the minesweepers.

It took only a few seconds after the explosion for the hull to take in so much water that the stern of the *Donator* rose into the air. Although the ship fought to stay afloat—trembling and shaking but not capsizing—it ultimately succumbed and went under, with the bow going down first.

**Diving:** The wreck of the *Donator* now rests on a shallow sand bottom, with the blasted bow at 48m and the stern at 51m depth. The deck is at a depth of 40m, with the superstructures about 35m below the surface. The wreck is

very large and swimming around it is only possible if the current is weak.

A dive to the *Donator* is an unforgettable experience. More than 60 years on the seabed have transformed the ship into a thriving reef. Shoals of damselfish swim all over. In crevices and shelters, hundreds of orange red tilefish can be found.

The stern is clearly the most interesting part of wreck, with huge and lush gorgonians overgrowing the propeller and rudder. Here, a large steering wheel can be found. And a little towards the bow, a replacement propeller is lashed. Swimming next to the four huge prop blades makes it immediately



with perforated metal walls attached. And yes, it is possible to swim through from one side of the wreck to the other. On both sides, there are empty davits from where the lifeboats were once suspended. The midship has largely collapsed, but

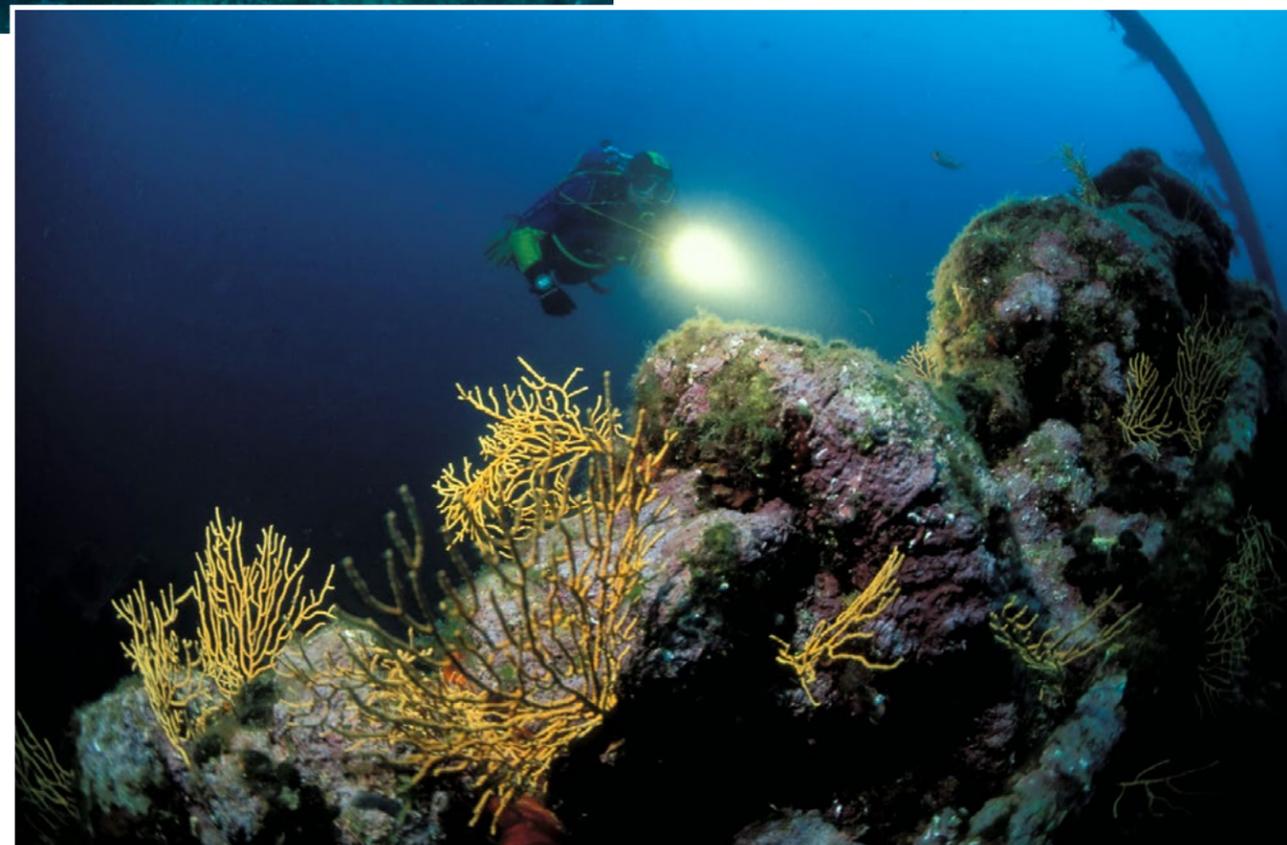
the sides of the former bridge still stand up steeply in front of the fore deck where large pieces of metal debris lay scattered. From the extent of destruction, it is evident where the explosion struck. The remains of the bow, which now rests on its tip on the sand, is surrounded by more debris.



**Le Liban wreck.** The sinking of the passenger steamer *Liban* outside the port of Marseille, with the loss of almost 200 lives, was the greatest maritime disaster ever off Southern France. The disaster which struck on 7 June 1903 was inexplicable. It was neither bad weather and poor visibility nor technical failure that caused the fully-loaded passenger liner en route to Corsica to collide with the incoming steamer *L'Insulaire*. Captain Lacotte, who commanded the *Liban*, executed some manoeuvres to free his vessel from the bow of the *L'Insulaire* and was eventually successful in doing so. But not before serious damage was inflicted on his ship.

Being aware of the consequences of the collision, he decided to head to the Ile Mairé to possibly run the ship aground

to keep her from sinking. The towering cliffs surrounding the island made beaching the vessel difficult but the captain opted to steer the stricken steamer at full steam between two protruding rocks at Les Farillons in front of a beach. The manoeuvre might just have succeeded, if not for what happened next. Only 20m shy of the shoal, the stern of the *Liban* slowly began to lift out of the water. With the propeller out of the water, the ship lost momentum and, under strong vibrations, the vessel came to a stop. The *Liban* began at first



#### LE LIBAN FACTS:

**Type of ship:** Passenger steamer  
**Nationality:** France  
**Weight:** 2,308 tons  
**Year of construction:** 1882  
**Sunk:** 1903  
**Cause:** Collision with another boat  
**Location:** Island of Maire, "Les Farillons," Marseille  
**Minimum depth:** 30m  
**Maximum depth:** 36m

the *Liban* broke midship. Once the curtain of water had fallen down and the bubbles dispersed, the once-proud ship had vanished.

**Diving:** The location at the Les

Farillons where the wreck rests slowly and then, with surprising speed, to sink bow first. Everything happened so fast that the crew had no time to deploy the lifeboats. A massive explosion followed as a boiler ruptured, tearing apart the steam engine. With a deafening crash and in a fountain of spray,

is protected from the northerly winds, but is exposed to the waves coming in from the south or east.

The *Liban* is about 50m long and lies with her bow at 30m and stern at 36m. As is usually the case with vessels with a keel, the *Liban* rests at an angle of 45 degrees on the seabed. Sliding over the railing and down to the rudder, a huge bronze propeller sticks out of the sand.

THIS PAGE: Scenes from *Le Liban* wreck



MESSERSCHMITT FACTS:

**Aircraft Type:** Interceptor  
**Nationality:** Germany  
**Weight:** 33,860 pounds  
**Year:** Unknown  
**Sunk:** 7 March 1944  
**Cause:** Engine failure  
**Location:** North of the island of Planier, Marseille  
**Depth:** 44m

the 30mm cannon firing through the propeller shaft ablaze.

His salvos kept missing their targets due to the

strong turbulence that threw his plane. After a second attack and pulling his plane back up, the engine suddenly stalled. Thanks to having gained high altitude and aided by a strong wind, the pilot managed to glide for many miles. The two American Lightning fighters left him alone, apparently having written off the Messerschmitt—the plane already had smoke coming out of the engine and steadily lost altitude.

However, thanks to his strong flying skills, Captain Fahrenberger managed

to fly the stricken plane to Le Planier, a small island with a lighthouse. Despite the windy conditions and wave action, he performed a controlled landing about 100 yards from the island and then made it ashore. There, he was later spotted and rescued by a German patrol vessel.

**Diving:** The wreck of the Messerschmitt lies almost exactly 100m from Le Planier at a depth of 45m. The plane is only 8.74m long, so it can easily be missed. It is possible to anchor directly over the wreck or to reach it by diving from the shore. This is always an eventful dive and the whole northern side of the island is covered by gorgonians. In slack currents, it is easy to get to the point on the rock wall just under the lighthouse, which is exactly south of the wreck. From here the plane is easily found by following a compass bearing of 0 degrees or due north.

Under the listing side of the hull, there is a dense cover of gorgonians with their intense red color lighting up if illuminated by a torch. This is a good spot to start exploring the wreck.

From the bow, which is still in a good state of preservation, swim over to the pile of rubble and iron parts to see the huge ruptured boiler that once formed part of the steam engine. This was the spot where the explosion that caused the vessel's demise occurred, so the level of destruction is most extensive here. Whenever there is current, divers can shelter behind the superstructure.

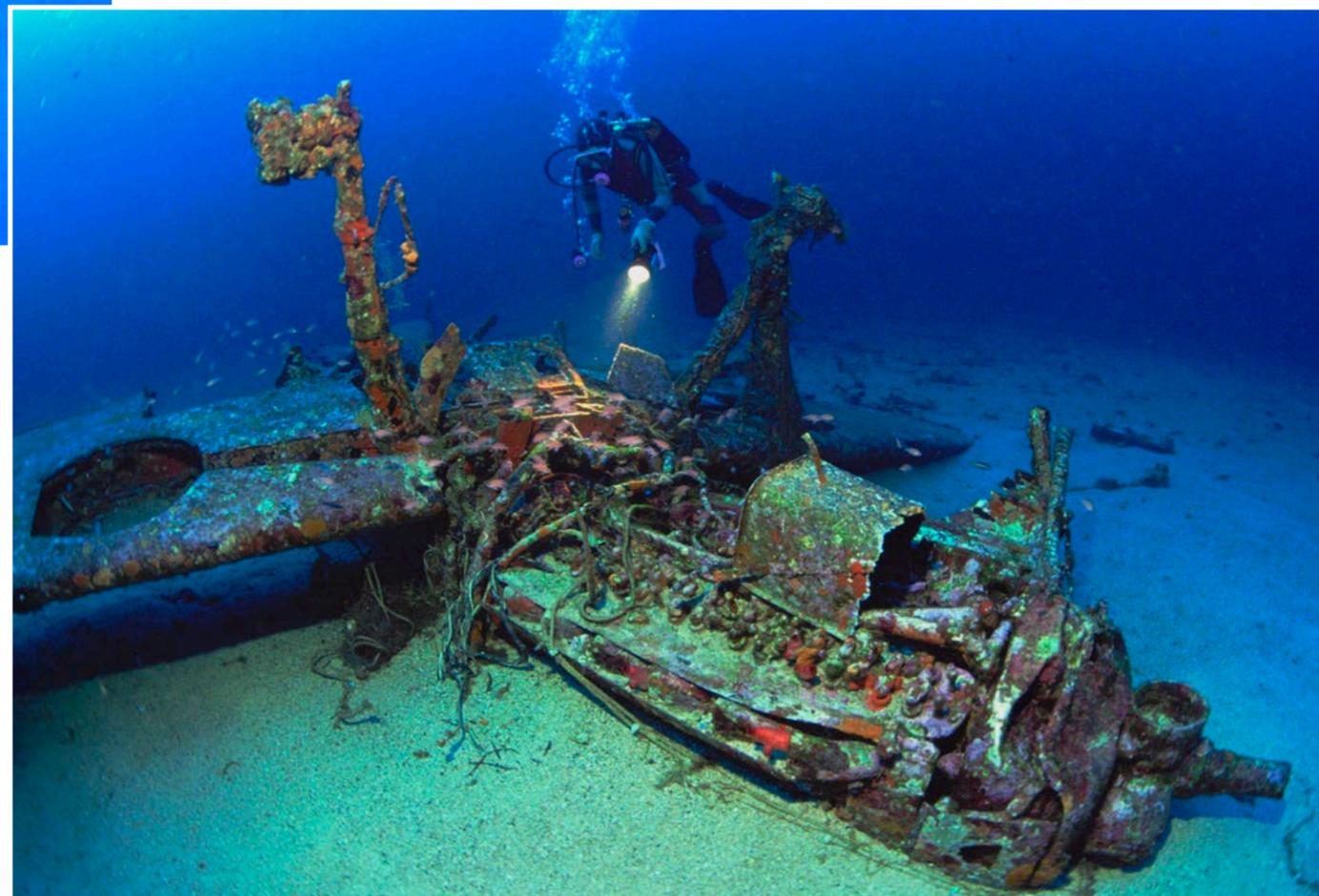
Thousands of damselfish usually scoot around on the former salon deck. Above the planks, schools of sea bream often congregate. Between the badly twisted iron parts, large conger eels hide with

their big googly eyes reflecting divers' lamplights. The abundance of fish and the growth on this wreck never fails to thrill me, over and over again.

In the deeper regions of the wreck, lush red gorgonians thrive. The deck is decorated with yellow horn corals strutting out from iron parts and in passages. The deck is flattened and there is a large anchor winch, which now rests beside the bow. From this point, there is a nice overview of the port side rail of davits, the erect bow and one of the masts, which lies on the sand of the starboard side of the wreck, among a lot of other debris. It is highly recommended to bring a dive lamp to illuminate the colorful gorgonians and spot the animals hiding amongst the iron parts.

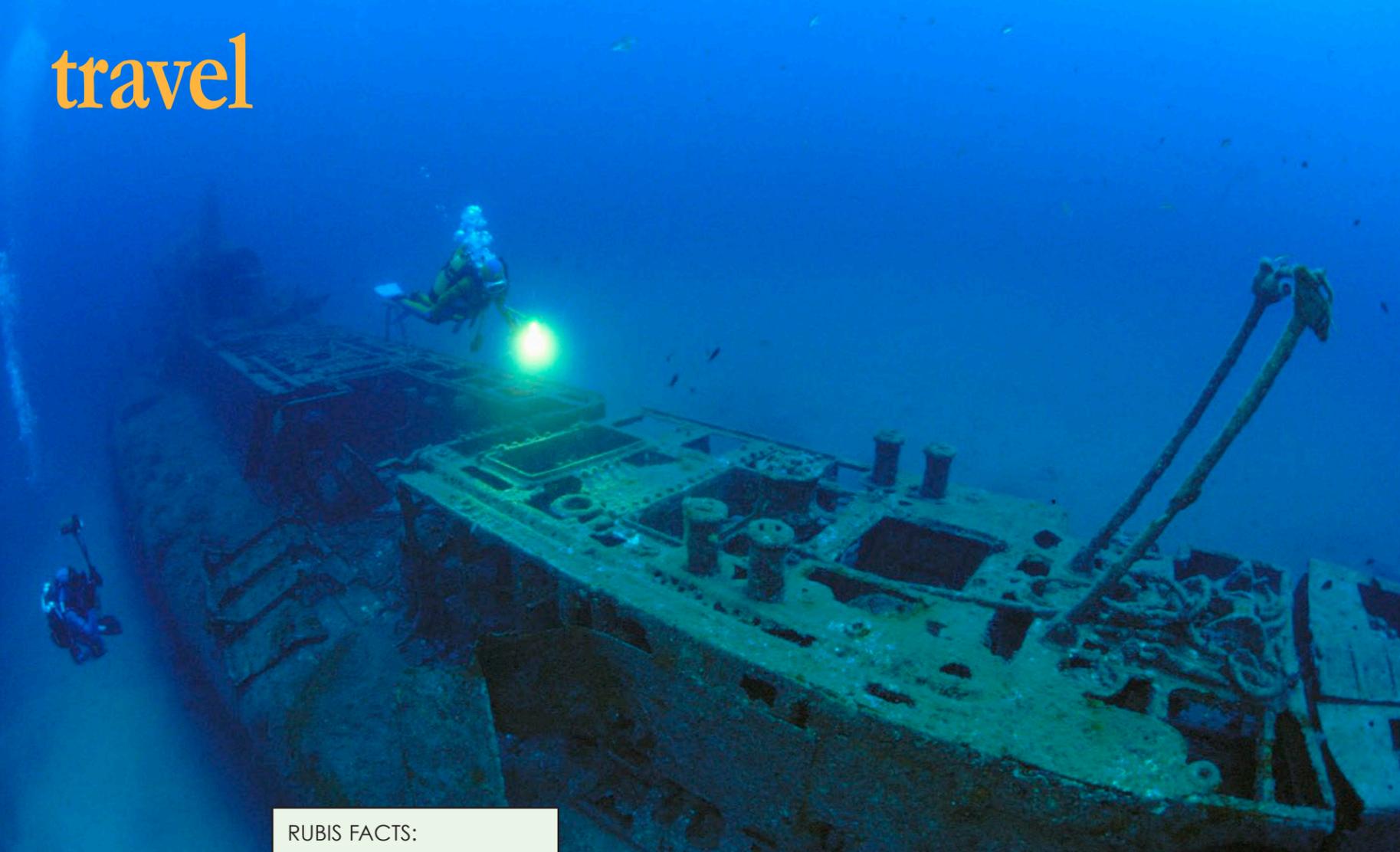
**Messerschmitt wreck.** On 7 March 1944, the alarm went off at the German air force base, Istre, near Avignon. Two American B-17 bombers, escorted by two Lightning fighter-interceptors, had been detected approaching Marseille. Two Messerschmitt ME 109 fighters were swiftly scrambled to intercept the enemy planes.

One of these was piloted by Captain Hans Fahrenberger, and the sortie that ensued would almost cost him his life. Once the enemy bombers were identified, the two Messerschmitt attacked without hesitation. Captain Fahrenberger dove towards the targets, with



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the wreck of the Messerschmitt





to captivate visiting divers. The wreck remains in an excellent state of preservation, even the conning tower, the gun platform and the mine covers, which, however, have begun to corrode.

Meanwhile, gorgonians and sponges have settled on both sides of the hull tubes, in tubes, on pipes, and in the many nooks and crannies. Thanks to the many big conger eels, moray eels and scorpionfish that now call the wreck home, the *Rubis* will continue to be a fascinating dive. There is rich growth

### RUBIS FACTS:

**Type of ship:** Minelayer submarine  
**Nationality:** France  
**Weight:** 762 tons  
**Launched:** 1931  
**Sunk:** 1958  
**Cause:** Sunk as a memorial monument  
**Location:** Cap Camarat, St Tropez  
**Minimum depth:** 34m  
**Maximum depth:** 41m

Following this course, the plane can be spotted from afar. It looks like a huge insect lying spread out, belly up. A blade of the propeller (which, driven by a 2000 HP engine, enabled the Me-109 to go as fast as 727 kph) still

sits, poking out of the sand. The others are gone. The tail, with the fin still attached, is slightly bent as the result of unsuccessful attempts by some commercial divers to lift the wreck to get to the cockpit.

As the aircraft sits on an open sandy area of the bottom, it has become an oasis for the marine life that have taken up residence

there. From within the barrel of the cannon, conger eels peek out onto the world, large tubeworms adorn the wings and the undercarriage, while the metal surfaces are encrusted with mussels.

Since the wreck is so small, it is paragon to avoid disturbing the seabed as kicking up sand immediately reduces the visibility.

**The submarine *Rubis*.** The French submarine *Rubis* was launched in 1930 and commissioned in 1932. The U-boat was designed to deploy mines in enemy territory without surfacing but she was also

able to fire torpedoes. All her 32 mines were carried on the outside of the pressure hull under a streamlined cover.

Other types of submarines at that time deployed mines through airlocks. The issue with this procedure was the weight loss that caused the deployment of the mine, which required the trim of the vessel to immediately be corrected. It was a tricky matter. The *Rubis* could dive to 50m and deploy her periscope from a depth of 15m.

On the deck, the dual 75mm Oerlikon cannons mounted there carried five torpedoes, which could be fired from the rear. During 28 missions, the *Rubis* deployed 683 mines, which sunk 23 ships. After the war, *Rubis* was moved to Toulon. The crew was

awarded the highest French and English medals. To spare the famous submarine from being ignominiously scrapped, it was scuttled with full honours in 1958 off Cap Camarat, between Cavalaire and Saint Tropez.

**Diving:** The *Rubis* sits upright in 40m of water. When the water is clear, her outline can be seen from the surface. There is something ominous about submarines that always seem



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the *Rubis* wreck



on the wreck and an abundance of fish. The conning tower, mine shafts, torpedo tubes, hydroplanes and the net cutter on the bow all look as if they have been taken right out of a movie set. But, mind you, this submarine is the real deal.

The *Rubis* is 66m long, so it is possible to swim around the whole wreck in a single dive. A foray through the narrow hatch of the submarine into the interior isn't recommended. Firstly, it is too tight of a squeeze to get through wearing a 15-liter tank or a twinset on your

back. Secondly, the sediment inside the wreck can reduce visibility to complete nothingness in an instant.

**Togo wreck.** The *Togo* was built by Robert Thompson & Sons in Newcastle and launched in 1882 under the name *Ville de Valence*. Owned by the Compagnie Havraise Peninsulaire, it imported citrus fruit from Spain. The ship's layout was ground-breaking, and it was the first in a new generation of ships. It was built entirely from stainless steel, had five watertight bulkheads, a dou-

ble-hull and was propelled by a powerful engine.

The ship was 76m long, 10.35m wide and weighed 1,640 tons. Sailing the large freighter required a 28-man crew. The *Togo* managed to get through the First World War unscathed, despite facing all sorts of dangers. While it was ultimately a German U-boat—the *UC-35*—which caused her demise, this was not until a good while after the war.

On 12 May 1918, some six months after the war ended, the *Togo* perished in the bay of Cavalaire where it

TOGO FACTS:

- Ship type:** Freighter
- Nationality:** France, later Italy
- Weight:** 1,640 tons
- Year of construction:** 1882
- Sank:** 12 May 1944
- Cause:** Sunk by Seemiene
- Location:** Approximately 800m east of "Pointe Dubreuil" Bay of La Cavalaire
- Minimum depth:** 45m
- Maximum depth:** 55m at the bow; 60m at the rear

was rediscovered only relatively recently. Although the fishermen in the sheltered bay made mostly profitable catches despite having their



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the *Togo* wreck



nets often snared, no one connected the dots—this was because, besides the nearby *Ramon Membru* wreck, nobody was even aware there was another shipwreck below the surface.

When the *Togo* was discovered by local divers, nobody knew its identity. The artifacts that were gradually recovered from the wreck then provided clues that ultimately led to the wreck's identification as that of the *Togo*.

**Diving:** The *Togo* is one of the biggest and most beautiful wrecks of the Côte. It is about 60m long but not entirely intact. Parts of the stern, including the a ten-meter-long part with propeller, are lying torn off and separate from the rest of the ship at a depth of over 60m. The freighter sits upright on the sandy bottom. The deck is 47m at the bow with the sandy bottom at 55m.



The first impression of the wreck as it starts to appear out of the din is that it is huge, overgrown with red gorgonians, and swarming with fish schooling around the boiler

structures.

It is recommended that one stays at the deck level, as the sides of the hull and the sandy bottom below are not very interesting. Besides, going any

deeper on an already deep dive would have a marked impact on dive time and decompression.

On each side of the bow and almost in a symmetrical position, there are two anchor winches at least two meters high still attached to their anchors with chains draped across the railing. The bow is pointed and the sides of the hull stand vertically, eight meters above the seabed.

Close to the bow, a few skylights can still be seen. On the front deck, there are big loading hatches. It is not worth the while to go inside the holds—aside from a little coal, there is nothing there.

After 20m down the front deck is the midship section. From here, divers can either continue along the ladders on either side of the ship or swim about a big gaping,



THIS PAGE: Scenes from the *Togo* wreck



round hole where the tall smoke stack once stood. On both sides of the vessel, davits protrude, now covered with lush red gorgonians.

Inside the superstructure, bathtubs and toilets can be seen. One of the masts now lies across the starboard side. Venturing a little further aft completes the tour. At this point, the deck is at 51m. Beyond, the stern just seems to drop off vertically into the dark abyss below.

Diving the *Togo* requires proper planning from the onset. Among other things, given the sheer size of the wreck, it is important to ensure you can find your way back to the ascent line. To allow for a decent tour, remain at the deck level, otherwise dive time will be too short. Carry a plentiful supply of gas and use proper equipment suitable for this type of dive.

### Best time to travel

The Mediterranean can be dived all year round. During winter, the water temperature drops to 12°C (54°F); by May, it climbs back above 12°C (60°F). Consequently, at least a semi-dry, or sometimes a drysuit is a prerequisite for staying comfortable during the dive.

Many dive operators now use better suits, permitting them to operate all year round. During the mild winters, diving is a real treat in the Mediterranean: after some days with no wind, the water is crystal clear and there appears to be more fish to see than in summer.

Overall, however, the best period is from June to October. The months of June and October I can recommend in particular because, while the weather is warm and stable and the water is clear, there are few tourists and prices at hotels and restaurants are lower.



**Dive certification & gear**  
As is the case anywhere in the world, proof of dive certification

must be presented in France and preferably also a personal log-book. The days when only French

certificates were recognized are long gone and c-cards from all major training agencies are

THIS PAGE: Scenes from the French Riviera where visitors will find picturesque villages and enjoy local culture, wines and cuisine; Port-Cros, France (top left)



Scenes from Saint-Tropez, France (top left, above, and right); *Flabellina sp* nudibranch (below); Diver and sea urchin on reef (left)

picturesque villages of Provence makes for a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. Then, there are the culinary delights. I am not referring to piz-



zas on walking streets, but to all those small "restaurants" and "brasseries" that are partly hidden in side streets that put the genuine *Cuisine Francaise* on the table.

And from a personal perspective: When it comes to wine, there is simply

no place in the world where Cotes de Provence or a red or rouge Bandol tastes better. □

For more information, visit Kurt Amsler's website at [www.photosub.com](http://www.photosub.com).



widely accepted. Most dive centers utilize combination tank valves that can be used both with a DIN fitting and A-clamp.

One great feature about the Côte is that it is a great place for a drive-and-dive holiday, complete with carrying along your own dive gear in the trunk. But if you prefer to travel light, modern equip-

ment from leading manufacturers can be hired in many locations.

**Profitez de la vie!**

On a concluding note, a diving holiday on the Côte d'Azur isn't just about enjoying what is under the surface. The landscapes, the scent of pine and the