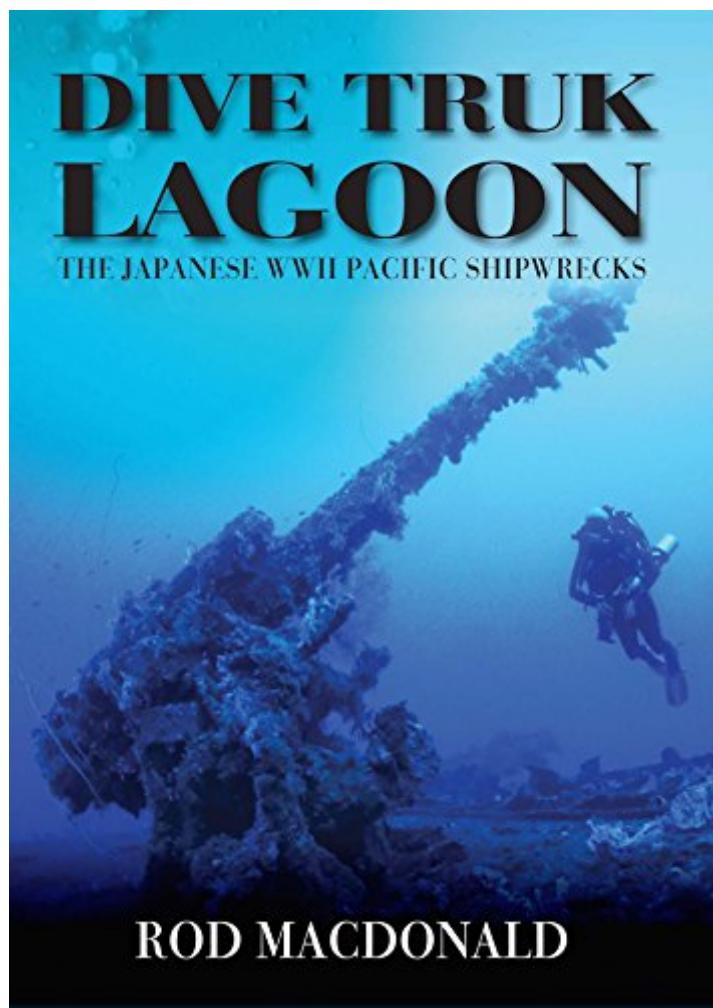


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Dive Truk Lagoon: The Japanese WWII Pacific Shipwrecks



Synopsis

Truk Lagoon is quite simply the greatest wreck diving location in the world. Scores of virtually intact large WWII wrecks filled with cargoes of tanks, trucks, artillery, beach mines, shells and aircraft rest in the crystal clear waters of the Lagoon. Each a man-made reef teeming with life. Truk was the main forward anchorage for the Japanese Imperial Navy and merchant fleet during the early days of WWII. Protected by a 140-mile coral barrier reef, with only a few heavily defended entrances, it seemed a well-protected safe anchorage. The lagoon had been fortified by the Japanese in great secrecy during the 1930s. The Allies knew little about it. By 1944, the tide of war had turned against the Japanese. The Allies were pushing westwards across the Pacific islands towards the Japanese homeland. A daring U.S. long range aerial survey showed the lagoon with the full might of the Imperial Japanese Navy; battleships, cruisers, aircraft carriers, submarines and destroyers, along with scores of large supply ships and transports. The Allies decided to attack immediately. Sensing this, the Imperial Japanese Navy scattered but the merchant ships remained to offload their cargoes of aircraft, tanks, artillery, mines and munitions. Other heavily laden supply ships continued to arrive, unaware of the Allied assault plans. Fresh from the Kwajalein Atoll assault, Task Force 58 was formed for an immediate attack. Operation Hailstone. In total secrecy, nine U.S. carriers holding more than 500 combat aircraft steamed towards Truk. Supported by a screen of battleships, cruisers, destroyers and submarines. Before dawn on 17 February, Strike Groups of 12 Hellcat fighters swept in low towards Truk under Japanese radar and immediately began strafing Japanese airfields. Soon, hundreds of aircraft were involved in one of the largest aerial dogfights of WWII which was over within an hour. With air superiority established, U.S. dive-bombers and torpedo-bombers spent the remainder of the day and the following day sinking all the large ships trapped in the lagoon. With Truk neutralised as a naval and air base, the Pacific war soon ended. The sunken ships of Truk Lagoon with their war cargoes were largely forgotten about until 1969, when an expedition by Jacques Cousteau located and filmed many of the wrecks. The resulting TV documentary, Lagoon of Lost Ships, went viral. Truk's secret was out and the beautiful wrecks, untouched since WWII, have proved an irresistible lure for thousands of divers each year since then.

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Customer Reviews

great history and doc on each vessel. Will be a good armchair book when I arrive there!

Very interesting and well written book

Nice easy read, very accurate description of the wreck. Worth the read.

After finishing this review, I noticed another posted on .co.uk which I duly read. Ordinarily I would ignore anything said by other reviewers - be they broadly in agreement with my own sentiments or not. On this occasion, however, the author (Rod Macdonald) had appended his own comments to that review in which he admitted to being in agreement with the criticisms made about the book's artwork. Consequently, I made suitable amendments to the following.

In the early hours of 17 February 1944 Operation Hailstone was launched. The immediate objective was to establish air superiority in and around Truk Lagoon by destroying Japanese airfields and aircraft. From 0440 hrs, fighters and fighter-bombers from 5 US Carriers continued to attack. Whereas surprise was complete, the Japanese Cruiser Katori, two Destroyers and the Akagi Maru escaped - although the latter was lost soon after. By 1800 hrs US Admiral Spruance had achieved total air superiority and, although he found the Japanese naval fleets absent, he was then able to

concentrate on destroying whatever vessels were in the lagoon. Altogether 45 ships were sunk, a further 27 damaged, some 275 aircraft destroyed, 90% of the Japanese fuel supplies set on fire and both the submarine and seaplane pens put out of action. The Japanese death toll was never published but was said to be the worst-ever for a two day engagement. By comparison, the US lost 25 aircraft, 29 aircrew and 11 sailors. Another four Japanese ships were also sunk in later engagements and IJN submarine I-174 was sunk by depth charges. In brief, that is how one of the greatest fleets of sunken ships found anywhere in the world was created. The wrecks of Truk Lagoon (now called Chuuk) have continued to attract divers ever since the advent of scuba diving. As regular readers of my reviews will know, all good books about ships and shipwrecks are wholly dependent on the author's ability to undertake and assimilate competent research. It is a time-consuming responsibility which few others are able to appreciate. There are no quick-fixes or short-cuts and one simply cannot get away with paraphrasing other works. Through a number of his books, Rod Macdonald has always impressed me as a writer who really does understand this concept and, in this instance, has provided a more-than-adequate assessment of the events of 1944. Although I found nothing new, his approach is interesting, informative and reasonably complete. I did not like the way in which the book is divided into 4 sections - each of which commenced with its own Chapter 1. This was reinforced by the headings which are simply inconsistent - as follows; Book One; War, Book Two; The Shipwrecks of Truk Lagoon, Japanese Aircraft Wrecks of Truk Lagoon and US Task Force 58 Strike Aircraft. One of the most outstanding features of Macdonald's books has always been the artwork he employs. These paintings of wrecks are of a very high standard. As one who has also commissioned the finest possible artwork to support his own books, I know exactly what is involved in producing such impressions. In some instances, however, we learn from those aforementioned comments that the images produced show some of the wrecks - as they were before having collapsed. All diving books become out-dated sooner than their authors would care to admit and none more so than those which are dedicated to the fast-deteriorating remains of shipwrecks. Over time, I have studied a number of works on that intriguing piece of marine real-estate called Truk Lagoon (still the preferred name!) aimed at the scuba diver (including those by Dan Bailey, Klaus Lindemann (2 books - although he did insist on using Operation Hailstorm and not Hailstone!), Roy Smallpage and William H. Stewart) plus numerous historic accounts of the relevant wartime events. All things considered, therefore, I do believe this to be a fair and accurate assessment of the events which led to the provision of so many shipwrecks in a single location and of the various descriptions of each wreck. For those who are new to the subject, this book is a good place to learn of those events and of the

individual ships now resting on the seabed. If the reader is able to overlook the fact that some (only some!) of the portraits of those wrecks are not as up-to-date (in terms of deterioration) as one is entitled to expect, it really is a very good book.NM

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