

South Pacific Diver Goes South Pacific

• By Bob Scott

After leaving Sydney in early 1965, for the territory, my first stop was at Lae, centralized in the Huon Gulf.

As the water isn't the best for diving in this area, due to the outflow of the Markham River, upon which the township is situated, I soon made contact with the local spearing club, who kindly offered to take me along the coast aways, on a few of their bi-weekly charters. The most frequented areas that we went to were Busama and Lalamua, which is located, 17 miles south of Lae. Also during my short stay there, this club organised a DC.3 flight charter to Finchaven on the northern tip of the Gulf.

In Rabaul, where I am at present, a newly formed group has also started organising charters by sea to the outlying islands and along the New Britain coast. It has been found that for good fishing, a person must move away from frequented waters as the fish are flighty. This is mainly due to bombing, which is carried out by the natives to supplement their food requirements. The water is normally very deep along the coast of New Guinea and New Britain, dropping off into hundreds of feet while only a few feet out from shore.

Allowing for this, the diver has to adopt a different technique of spearing rather than the old southside way of diving straight down and bashing them as they lay on the bottom. For as I mentioned earlier, the water is very deep and the fish just glide down into the gloom if they are in any way spooked.

The coral growths are very prolific in the shallower water along with the small coral fish. Sort of drives you mad if you haven't an u/w camera in your hands.

Schools of hump-headed Maori Wrasse are very common in these waters, along with the good old stand-by, the coral trout. The Wrasse swim in very large schools of up to 15 to 20, whilst maintaining weight at around the 40 to 50 lb. mark. Reef sharks are very common along with the beautiful Butterfly Cod. Stonefish are also common, whilst the coral snakes can make life a little bit more

interesting in a very short time. There are quite a few shells on all the beaches and around the shallower areas. The most common being the Conch, or 'Triton's Trumpet' and Helmet species with very large Tiger Cowries, spiders, cones, etc.

Wrecks just about literally cover the bottom of Rabaul Harbour, ranging from lighters, flying boats, destroyers and aircraft carriers. Some have been removed and cut to pieces by the Japanese salvage teams that were here recently, but others have never been found although approx. positions have been given on the Admiralty charts.

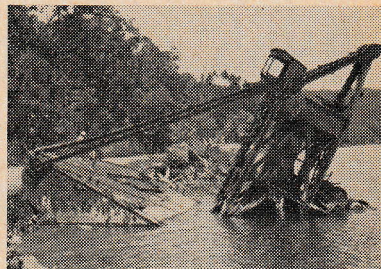
So far the author has recovered Japanese rice bowls, plates, lights and helmets from various wrecks, along with Theodilite Tripods, cannon shells, Saki bottles etc. One experience gained by him was while diving four decks down in an old Jap freighter. His U/W torch went out just after entering a cabin. As there was absolutely no light this far inside the ship, apprehension quickly mounted until a faint glow discerned the companionway through which he had entered. Moving towards it, his tank fouled some electric cables, which were hanging down from the roof, but after a brief struggle he broke free and headed for the surface.

Other dangers which you quite often come across up here are bombs, lying on the ocean floor and up on the shallower reefs. Salt water has often deteriorated the casings, allowing the explosive to be dispersed by tidal action. But with the heavier high explosive bombs, this is not the case, although they may be covered in coral they are normally still fully intact, so therefore caution and common sense should be exercised at all times in these areas.

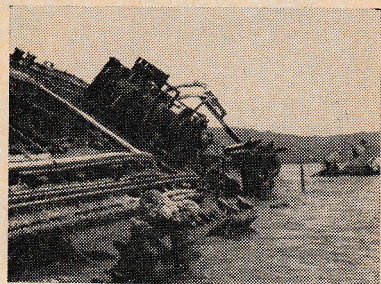
But all in all, it's not too bad up this way and I hope to move on to other areas where the fishing may be a bit better, or the water a bit shallower, that is of course unless an u/w camera arrives here in the very new future.



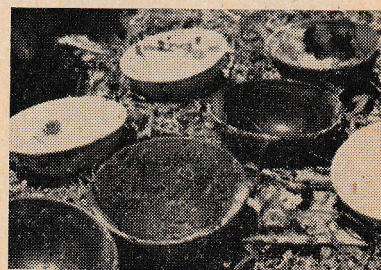
The author, Bob Scott, with Japanese rice bowl and glass from starboard light.



Bombed out floating crane, captured by Japanese in Singapore, was towed to Rabaul before being sunk by Allied aircraft.



Remains of a mine layer in shallow water.



Rice bowls, some coral encrusted, while others were in new condition.