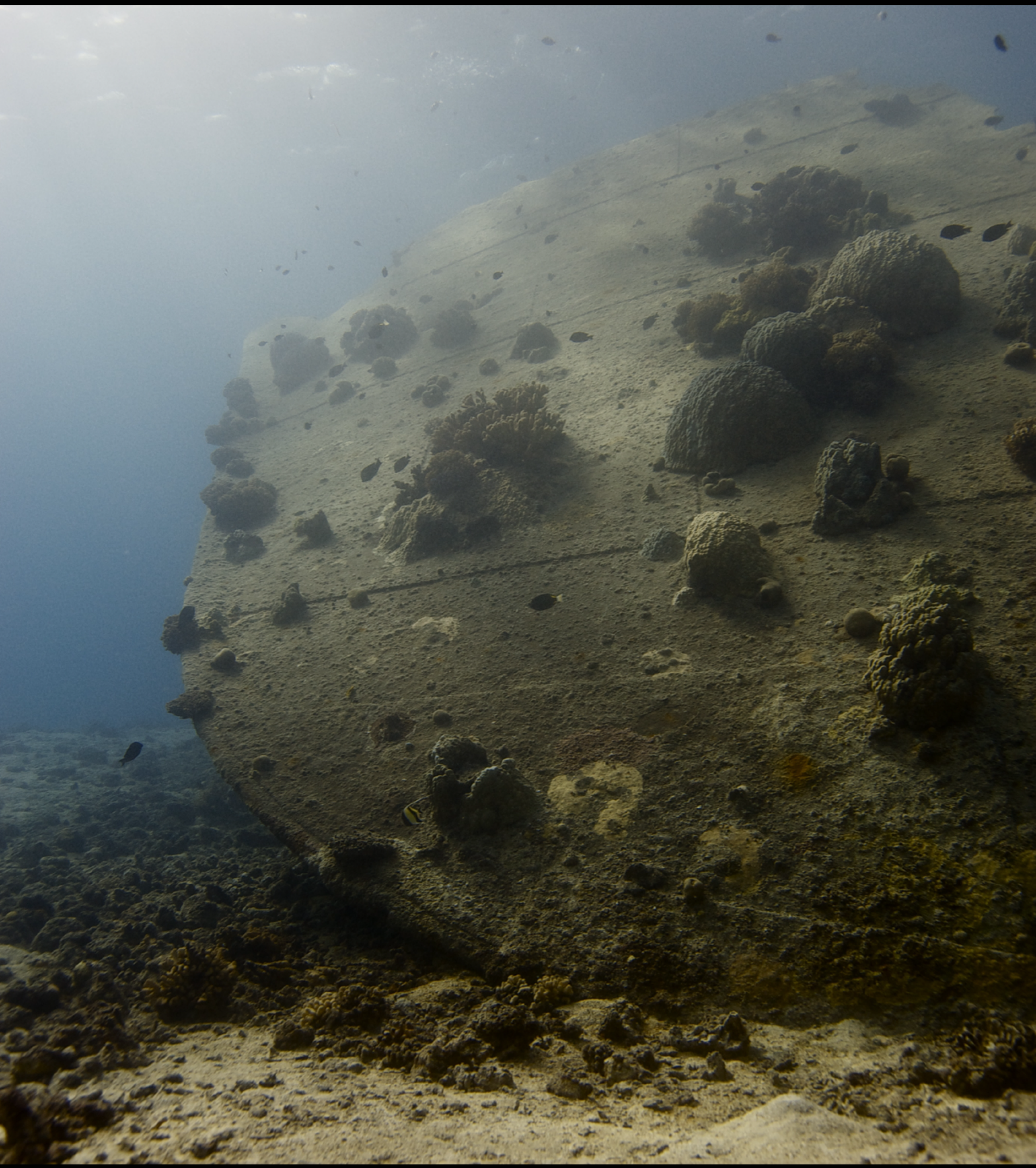
WORLD WAR II MARITIME HERITAGE TRAIL
BATTLE OF SAIPAN

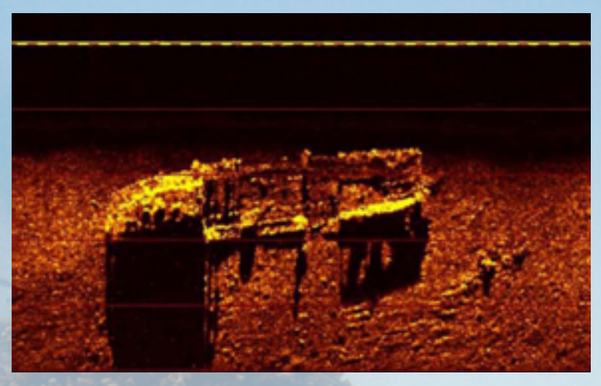


SHIPWRECKS

Image: Bow of Japanese freighter

Daihatsu Landing Craft

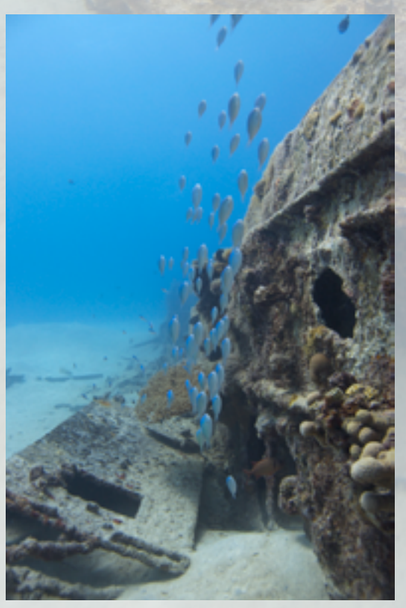
The Daihatsu Class landing craft was a large motorized boat used by the Japanese Special Naval Landing Forces of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) during WWII. It was similar to the U.S.-built landing craft, with a bow ramp that was lowered to disembark cargo and troops onto the beach; however, the Daihatsu was more seaworthy than U.S. craft due to its modified catamaran hull design. It was powered by a diesel engine that had a relatively long range for such a small craft. It could be modified to carry weapons of up to 37-mm caliber as armament and could be up-armored against 40-mm fire.



Visit the Landing Craft

Two Daihatsu Class landing craft are located in Tanapag Lagoon on a sandy bottom in approximately 35ft (11m) of water. The adjacent area is known to attract schools of spotted eagle ray (*Aetobatus narinari*). Giant morays (*Gymnothorax javanicus*) live among the complex interior hull structure, and can be found with their heads exposed to the current. This species is the largest in the world and can grow to 3m (9ft) in length.

The first Daihatsu, located at 15 13’ 52.82”N, 145 43’ 18.95”E (55P 0362737N, 1684299E) (WGS 84), is the most intact with the bow, midships hull, and stern in their original upright position. The bow ramp is still closed but not completely locked in place. Some of the vessel’s machinery is located in its original position in the stern. The second landing craft lies at the same water depth, approximately 150ft (45m) exactly southwest of the first. Overall, it is more degraded and disarticulated. Several features, including the helm and steering wheel, hull framing, and bow ramp, have all collapsed and are lying either within the hull, or in the sand surrounding it.



Possible Auxiliary Submarine Chaser

The remains of a possible Japanese auxiliary submarine chaser sunk in Tanapag Lagoon were first examined by archaeologists in the mid-1980s. At the time, local tour operators referred to the site as the “submarine.” However, careful examination of the remains of this WWII-era ship revealed that it was not a submarine, but exhibited characteristics of an auxiliary submarine chaser.

During the first strikes on Japanese shipping and support installations in Saipan on February 22 and 23, 1944, aircraft from the U.S. carriers *Essex* and *Yorktown* damaged or sank all ships still within the confines of Tanapag Lagoon. While no submarine chasers were reported sunk, two auxiliary submarine chasers, *Kyo Maru 8* and *Kyo Maru 10*, were lost during those raids. A Japanese interactive database developed by the War Memorial Maritime Museum in Kobe, Japan provides information on more than 600 Japanese ship losses in the Northern Mariana Islands. The information provided on *Kyo Maru 8* and *Kyo Maru 10* suggests both vessels were actually sunk 3.7mi (6km) west of the southern edge of Cape Lalo, Tinian. It is possible both ships were able to make it to Saipan before being abandoned and sinking, much like *Shoan Maru*. The confusion among various records and reports by different military services adds to the mystery surrounding their loss, and reinforces the necessity for archaeological investigation of the site.

Kyo Maru 8

The two auxiliary submarine chasers, *Kyo Maru 8* and *Kyo Maru 10*, were built in 1938 as part of Japan’s Supplementary Fleet Programs, initiated in 1931 under agreement with the nation’s merchant shipbuilders. As such, both were designed to be used as whaling ships after the war. Shortly after completion, both ships were requisitioned as auxiliary submarine chasers. Their sleek hull design was suitable for high speed chases, whether for whales or submarines. *Kyo Maru 8* and *Kyo Maru 10* were steamers of 342 tons, which suggests they were outfitted with single- or double-expansion vertical steam engines and water tube boilers. Other similar ships of the same approximate tonnage range in size from 160 to 210ft (48.7 to 64m) long. These vessels typically had their bridge and machinery mounted amidships, with spaces forward and aft for armament and depth charge launchers.

Like the Japanese freighter, this vessel was reportedly impacted during the 1950s by post-war clearing associated with salvage and removal of navigation hazards. According to NOAA navigation chart 81076, the wreck is located in an area that was cleared to a depth of 10ft (3.04m). Extensive damage at the site suggests it may also have been used in the 1950s for demolition training by the CIA. In 1984, some munitions were still visible and scattered throughout the wreckage. Recent examination of the site has revealed munitions still present. If you visit the wreck and observe munitions, please be careful not to touch or move them - it is prohibited by Commonwealth Law, but more importantly could be hazardous.

Visit the Shipwreck

The possible Japanese auxiliary submarine chaser lies on its starboard side in approximately 30ft (9.1m) of water on a sandy bottom at 15 13’ 57.12”N, 145 43’ 18.09”E (55P 0362712N, 1684448E) (WGS 84). The site is contained within an area measuring approximately 200ft (60m) by 50ft (15m), and there is little scattered debris away from the main concentration of hull remnants. Larger species of fish dominate the fauna associated with this complex shipwreck. Dense schools of soldierfish (*Myripristis* spp.), blue-stripe snapper (*Lutjanus kasmira*) and yellow-margined seaperch (*Lutjanus fulvus*) intermingle inside the cavernous hull sections. Usually found in areas rich in coral, the secretive emperor angelfish (*Pomacanthus imperator*) can be observed hiding beneath ledges in the wreckage. Likely attracted by the presence of large fish, bluestreak (*Labroides dimidatus*) and bicolor cleaner wrasse (*Labroides bicolour*) are common, and can regularly be seen swimming inside the mouths and gills of larger fish.

About 40ft (12m) of the bow section remains intact and is an excellent photo opportunity for underwater photographers. The bow section appears to have been cut down to the second deck. Small hatches are present and lead into the narrow cargo spaces forward. The remainder of the ship is badly broken up, although the wreckage generally follows the original line of the hull. No evidence of the engine or boilers is present; however, what appears to be a section of collapsed funnel is present amidships. Just aft of amidships, the hull is severely fragmented, and little evidence exists of the vessel’s stern, steering gear, or propellers. The site’s overall appearance makes it difficult to understand exactly what happened to the vessel during and after its loss. Some evidence suggests the hull was cut up or blown apart with explosives just aft of amidships during post-war channel clearing. This theory is supported by the presence of hull material on the opposite side of the shipping channel that could be associated with the site. Further archaeological investigation is warranted at this site in order to fully interpret and identify it.

Preserving Our Wrecks

Shipwrecks, aircraft wrecks and other underwater archaeological sites are protected like historical sites are on land. They are non-renewable resources, and although ships and planes continue to sink every day, there will never be another WWII aircraft wreck or submarine chaser wreck. What we have now is all we will ever have. These wrecks are important because they provide us with the details of history and represent the men and women who were involved in the conflict. All underwater sites including shipwrecks, aircraft wrecks and other vehicles are protected under CNMI Public Law 3-39. This law protects all archaeological sites on Commonwealth-owned or controlled lands and submerged bottomlands from unauthorized disturbance, excavation, or removal of artifacts. Historic wrecks located in Commonwealth waters are protected just as natural resources are protected, so that future generations may visit, learn from, and enjoy these unique examples of our underwater heritage.

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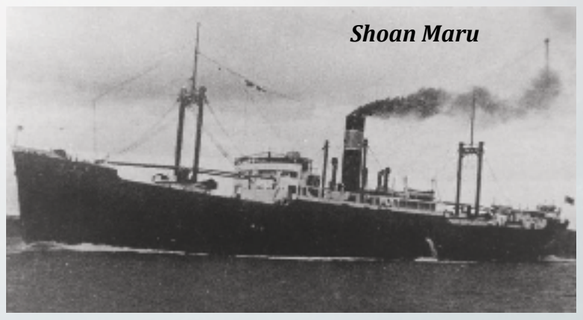

Shoan Maru

Japanese Freighter (presumably *Shoan Maru*)

Locally referred to as the *Chinsen*, or “the shipwreck,” this wreck is a Japanese merchant vessel tentatively identified in 1990 as *Shoan Maru*. Nearly two dozen merchant vessels, including *Shoan Maru*, were sunk in Tanapag Lagoon or in deep waters surrounding Saipan during WWII. Commissioned during the war years, they served as auxiliary submarine chasers, guard boats, and transports. Many ships used as transports during the inter-war years and later requisitioned for use during WWII were either purchased from foreign builders or seized during WWI. The list of typical transports provided in *Warships of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1869-1945* includes ships built in Scotland, Germany, and England. These ships were generally fitted with vertical triple-expansion steam engines and water tube boilers. This was the standard of the day and so their presence on the wreck is a good time-marker of pre-war build.

Very little information has come to light regarding the history of *Shoan Maru*. It is referenced only as a standard steamer transport of 5,624 gross registered tons built in 1937 and requisitioned for use during the war years. As such, it was not purpose-built for wartime use. The date of construction and classification suggests a configuration in which the bridge, machinery, and passenger spaces were positioned amidships.

According to records of U.S. submarine attacks, *Shoan Maru* was torpedoed by USS *Whale* on 27 January 1943 west of Rota. It was damaged but, due to defective torpedoes, the ship did not sink and was later towed to Saipan for repair or salvage. At the time of the submarine attack it was reportedly carrying conscripted Korean soldiers which have since been commemorated on the shipwreck site with a monument. The ship was still grounded in Tanapag Lagoon more than a year later when it was damaged beyond repair during airborne raids from the Task Force 58 carriers *Essex* and *Yorktown*. During the post-war cleanup of the harbor in the 1950s, the ship was cut down to the waterline because it was considered a navigation hazard. From 1949 to 1962, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had control over much of the northern half of Saipan. Under the cover of the U.S. Navy, a facility known as the Naval Technical Training Unit (NTTU) provided training in intelligence tradecraft, communications, counter-intelligence, psychological warfare techniques, and sabotage. The remains of *Shoan Maru* were reportedly used for explosives training by the NTTU.

Visit the Freighter

The disarticulated remains of this Japanese freighter lie in approximately 35ft (10m) of water on a sandy bottom at 15 14’ 3.81”N, 145 43’ 27.5”E (55P 0362994N, 1684652E) (WGS 84). The ship lies on its starboard side and little remains intact, except for a section of the bow. Although most of the ship has been damaged due to the effects of explosives and salvage efforts, the major elements such as the engines, boilers, steering gear, and superstructure are located in the general area of their original positions. At one time, a few bicycles were still visible in the cargo areas; however, these have not been seen for years. The overall length of *Shoan Maru* was approximately 400ft (125m), but the wreck as it appears on the seabed is scattered over an area of approximately 900ft (274m). This is likely due to salvage and explosion efforts.

Marine life on the wreck is abundant and changes from season to season. The sheer size of the surviving structure attracts greater numbers of larger fish species. Predatory red bass (*Lutjanus bohar*) patrol the edge of the wreck, and also school at the bow in heavier currents. Shoals of daisy parrotfish (*Chlorurus sordidus*) scour the hull for algae. Schools of yellowfin goatfish (*Mulloidichthys vanicolensis*) shelter on the leeward side, often associating with bluestripe snapper (*Lutjanus kasmira*), whose coloring they resemble. Solitary Chinese trumpetfish (*Aulostomus chinensis*) can also be found on the leeward side of the wreck. This species is usually a mottled brown color on the wreck; however, a bright yellow color phase can be observed in other regions.