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TWO FAMOUS WW11 WARSHIP WRECKS DISCOVERED!

The discovery of the wreck of the famous British heavy cruiser HMS *Exeter*, along with one of her two destroyer escorts, HMS *Encounter*, can now be ‘officially’ revealed for the first time after a successful multi day / multi dive expedition to the wreck sites. Initially discovered in the Java Sea on 21st February 2007, almost 65 years to the day after their sinking, the extraordinarily historically significant discovery culminated five years of persistent searching by a dedicated core group of shipwreck explorers (see footnote for more details). However, it was decided at the time that news of the discovery would be delayed until high definition video footage and high resolution digital images of the wrecks were taken so there could be *no doubt whatsoever* as to just which wrecks the group had discovered. Their recent April 2008 survey expedition entitled ‘*Java Sea Revisited – The HMS Exeter Expedition*’ has now accomplished that task and in honour of her brave crew left a Royal Navy Ensign attached to her port torpedo tubes to ‘fly’ in the ocean currents sweeping over the *Exeter* wreck site.

At the time of her discovery in 2007 *Exeter* was one of the last of the legendary WW11 warships whose wreck had yet to be located. She had initially gained world wide fame for her part in the destruction of the German pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* off Montevideo in 1939, the first major victory at sea for the British Royal Navy in WW11. *Exeter* herself was then sunk in uncannily similar circumstances in the Java Sea on March 1st 1942 - along with her destroyer escort *Encounter* (and the United States Navy destroyer USS *Pope*) - by gunfire and torpedoes from the four heavy cruisers of the Japanese Navy’s CruDiv 5 (Cruiser Division 5, HIJMS *Ashigara*, *Haguro*, *Myoko* and *Nachi*) and their attendant destroyers (HIJMS *Akebono*, *Ikazuchi*, *Inazuma*, *Kawakaze* and *Yamakaze*). However, the recent expedition’s findings tend to verify *Exeter*’s survivors claim that she was certainly helped on her way to the bottom by her gallant crew who opened valves and seacocks to prevent her capture when all was seen to be lost. Now, although *considerable* battle damage is evident on the wreck, *Exeter* slumbers peacefully on her starboard side in just over 60m/200ft of water, with her ever protective soul mate *Encounter*, who passed up an chance to escape by turning back in an heroic but futile bid to protect her, still ‘on eternal patrol’ nearby.

Only 48 hours before her own sinking *Exeter*’s fighting ability had been seriously compromised by an 8” shell hit to her engine room from the Japanese heavy cruiser *Haguro* during the disastrous fleet engagement known as The Battle of the Java Sea (at the time the largest naval engagement since the Battle of Jutland in WW1). There she fought and bled alongside such notable warships as the Australian light cruiser HMAS *Perth*, the American heavy cruiser USS *Houston* and the two Dutch light cruisers Hr Ms *Java* - and the fleet flagship - Hr Ms *De Ruyter* (on which Admiral

Doorman lost his life). As it turned out, by the time *Exeter* herself was sinking just before noon on March 1st, *ALL* those allied ships, plus a handful more, were already on the bottom of the Java Sea.

The discovery of the two British warships - besides culminating five years of dedicated wreck searching, and numerous other historically important wreck discoveries by the group along the way - has now *finally* put to rest the debate within the historical community as to exactly where *Exeter* and her consort were sunk, as their actual sinking location has been the subject of much conjecture and debate over the intervening years, with several 'official' positions actually on record. As it turns out *ALL* previous positions are *wrong*, with her final resting place about 30 nautical miles from an Admiralty position, almost 60nm from where her Captain, Oliver Gordon, recorded she went down, and almost 350nm from Sunda Strait! (Little was known of her fate until after the end of WW11, as those of her crew that did not perish with the ship were captured by the Japanese and interned in their brutal prisoner of war camps for the duration of the war. Given that many of those that survived the sinking did not survive that long and torturous ordeal, and obviously no records were saved from the sinking ship, the confusion over her actual sinking location is understandable.) Detailed survey results from the April 2008 expedition, including battle damage sustained to both ships superstructure and hull, etc, backed up by high resolution digital still images and high definition video evidence of same, once correlated, will also greatly help historians to determine exactly just what took place in the last fateful minutes before the two British ships were overwhelmed by the stronger Japanese forces.

FOOTNOTE: In November 2006 an area of about 90 square miles was extensively searched for the two wrecks without success, one of many 'dry holes' the group had searched in the preceding five years. However, on the evening of February 21st 2007, during a live-aboard dive vessel transit from Australia to Singapore with only a 'skeleton' dive group on board, HMS *Exeter* was finally discovered - just outside the 2006 search 'box' - and then dived on for the very first time the next day by owner/skipper Vidar Skoglie, his wife Alice Skoglie, Phil Yeutter (Captain, US Navy retired) and Australian photojournalist Kevin Denlay. Incredibly, later the same day they also discovered and dived on HMS *Encounter*, whose wreck lays just several miles away from *Exeter* herself! As time was of the essence on the transit to Singapore only several dives were made on the wrecks to positively confirm their identity and the very first still photos and low resolution video were taken. On the groups last dive on *Exeter* at the time of discovery a Royal Navy Ensign was taken down and 'flown' over the wreck for 30 minutes by Denlay, a Fellow International of the Explorers Club (New York), and then brought back to the surface with the intent of forwarding it to the current HMS *Exeter* (D89), or the *Exeter's* Survivors Association, once the discovery news was released. (Consequently, on the groups return in April, the RN/MOD was notified through the appropriate 'channels' in Singapore.)

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