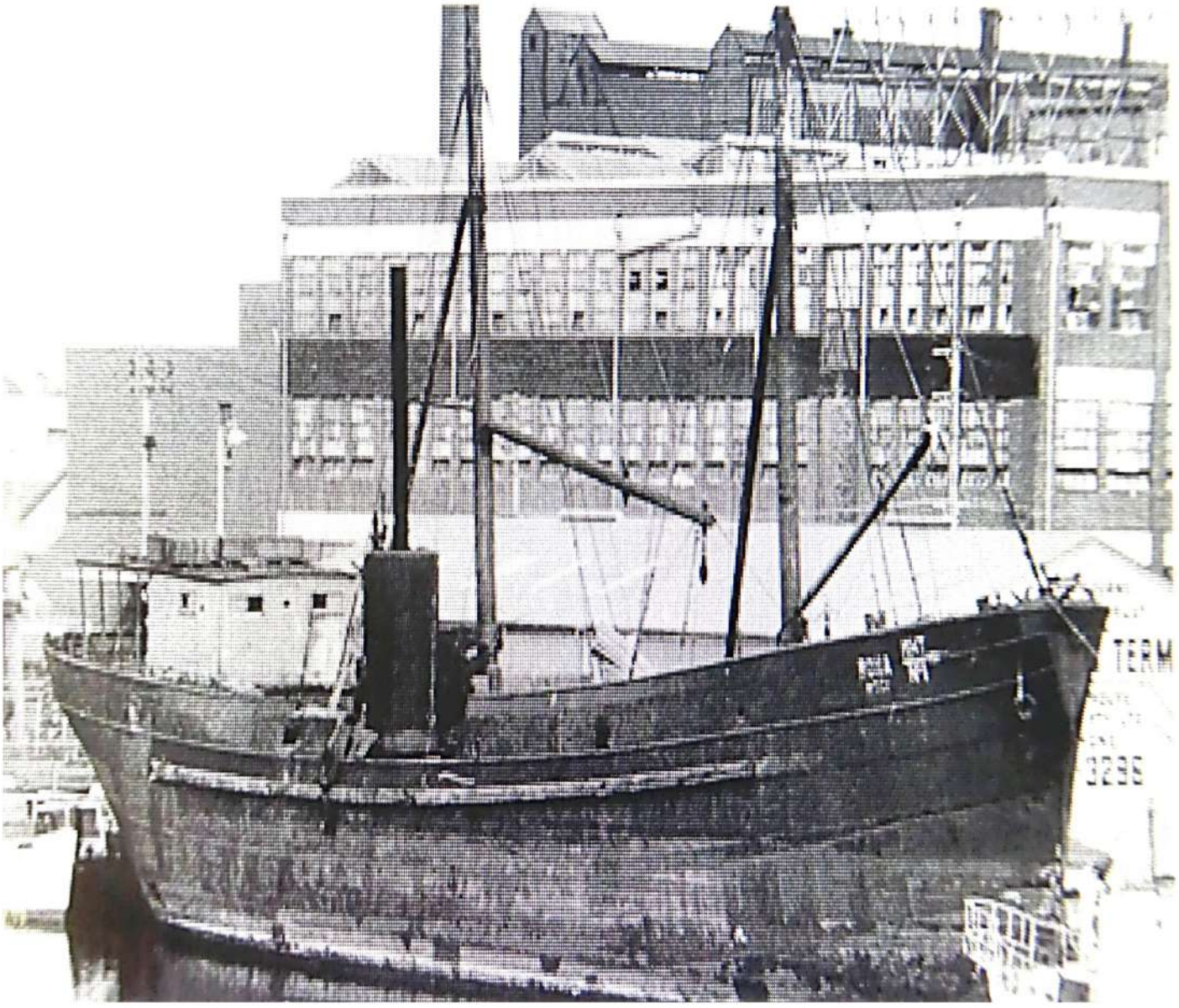
WAVE

Number 188 **"the ship comes first"** **March 2025**

The Newsletter of the Barque *Polly Woodside* Volunteers Association Inc.



Polly Woodside – As we first found her, but is she heading back to how she was?

Contents:-

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Chairman's Report for 2024:-,*Achieved 510 Hrs worked on Polly Woodside in 2025*

Please Note:- As we cannot hold our Annual General Meeting at Polly Woodside, a new venue must be found – any ideas?

Our Tuesday Gang of volunteers consists of our new recruits Colin, Drew, and Lauren-Jane are but not members yet. Jeff is back when ashore and me. Campbell can also be down after a 2-hour trip from Bendigo, and Mike Ridley is getting down whenever he can. Roger Wilson is coming when he is able. We miss Mark but he has stated that he cannot work with NTAV.

The Deckhouse: -

The deckhouse starboard cabin door has been renewed and painted, after being stove in by vandals.
The galleys fittings have gone rotten caused by the roof leaking and will have to be renewed.
The mystery deepens as three of the cabin door lintels that Campbell restored have disappeared and will require replacement.

The Ship: -

Decks & scuppers cleaned, & the rubbish cleared from under fo'c'sle head, but she still requires painting inside and out.
With the Poop awning replaced with its new patch the water entry into the officers' quarters seems to be fixed (we hope), and after a week or so of rain, the aft accommodation remained dry.
We have started overhauling the poop deck furniture, to be cleaned and re-oiled
Jeff is preparing a replacement base for the starboard side poop steps as the deck planks are showing signs of the 'worse for wear'.
Fo'c'sle has water leaking into the Paint Lockers, and down into the lower fo'c'sle.
The fo'c'sle deck's caulking was tamped down, and new bitumen installed. Pump in lower fo'c'sle compartment reconnected, and the space bucketed out.
As the ship is getting black mould in the deck house, (2nd Mate's cabin, which is locked for security reasons), the fo'c'sle paint lockers, and the deck house, it would appear that professional cleaners are required to prepare the ship so we can paint her.
Unfortunately, she doesn't look any better, with the officers' quarters now looking tatty, as well as the broken light fittings, and require attention! We have been assured that they have been ordered!

The Site:

The dock side workshop bench has been cleared in preparation for the ongoing ships' blocks to be repaired and renewed.
National Trust's maintenance gang (Myron, Craig and Tim) came down to work on the site, and we now have Craig coming down every second week to help.
The site has been cleaned and tidied, with lots of miscellaneous rubbish cleared, and with the result it doesn't look too bad.
Guess what! We are still being used for zooming practice by a Mudlark, which has made a nest on port side of the fore-course yard.

As the National Trust have told us they are broke and haven't any money to spend on Polly, it would appear there will be no celebrations in 2030 for her 175th birthday, or 2055 for her 200th birthday.

From Smithsonian Magazine **February 2025** **Sean Kingsley** **History Correspondent**

How Britain's Secret Decoy Ships Outfoxed German U-Boats During World War I

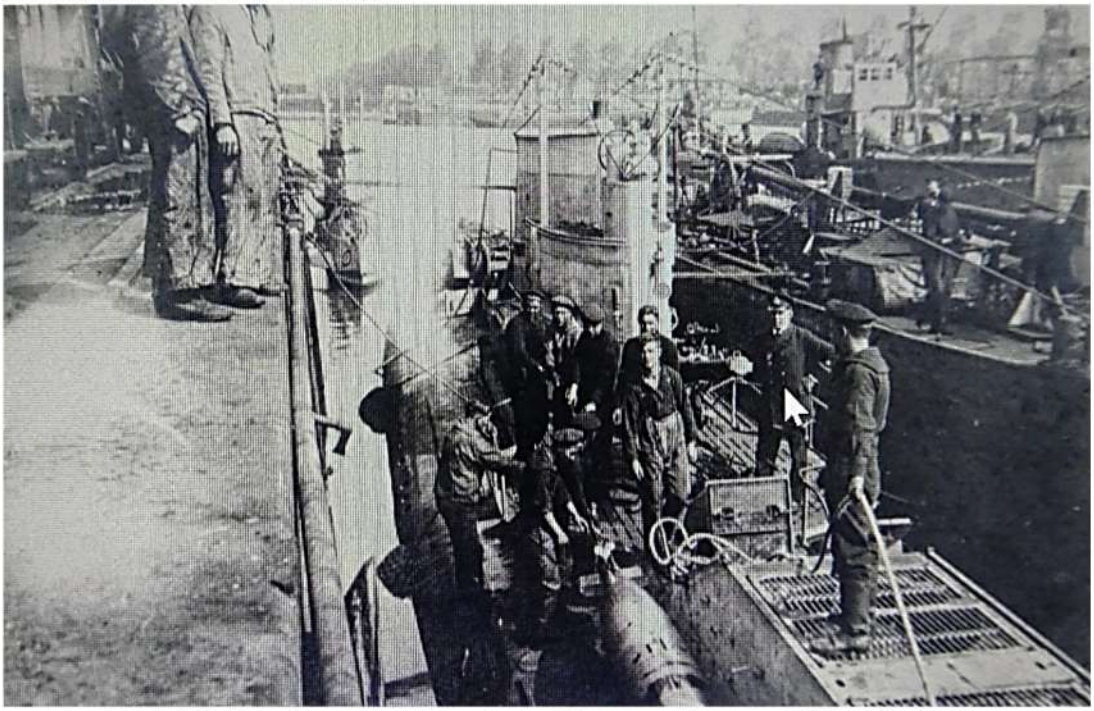
Divers recently discovered the wreck of a German submarine and the Royal Navy Q-ship that sank it in February 1917

Diver Chris de Putron inspects the wreck of the German submarine '*UC-18'*, which sank off the Channel Islands in February 1917. © Karl Taylor

World War I was raging off the British Isles when the German submarine '*UC-18*' surfaced to attack easy prey on the chilly morning of February 19, 1917. Its target, the '*Lady Olive*', was about eight miles off the west coast of Guernsey in the Channel Islands, or so the old story goes. A 200-foot-long coal trader, the '*Lady Olive'* was an old, accident-prone vessel—nothing special.

This sitting duck would be another victim in the submarine's reign of terror. Since early November 1916, *UC-18* had sunk 33 ships off the coast of northern France and southern England. The type UC II class of submarine could operate independently 9,430 nautical miles from base; its role was to starve Britain of food and war supplies and intimidate the Allied power into submission.

"Fully loaded, these submarines put to sea with 7 torpedoes, 18 mines and 133 rounds for the 88-millimeter deck gun," says Lawrence Sondhaus, a historian at the University of Indianapolis and the author of *The Great War at Sea: A Naval History of the First World War*. "In designing it, the Germans packed a lot of destructive potential into a small warship."



A UC class German submarine and its crew Courtesy of Karl Taylor

After firing a torpedo into the '*Lady Olive'*, '*UC-18'* surfaced to finish off the wounded ship. Then mayhem broke out. A decoy British Q-ship adapted to lure German submarines to their demise, the '*Lady Olive'* was equipped with five guns hidden below its deck. The trader started firing at the submarine. When the smoke lifted, both vessels had vanished

The truth behind what happened that fateful day remained a mystery for decades. The '*Lady Olive'* certainly sank: All of its crew members escaped in lifeboats, singing psalms to stave off hypothermia, and were saved after 36 hours at sea. Though these survivors testified that the submarine had gone down, too, some experts remained sceptical, as its wreck was never found. Could '*UC-18'* and its 28-man crew have somehow escaped the encounter? If not, where was the vessel's final resting place?

After four years of historical research supported by deep diving, a team led by filmmaker Karl Taylor has finally solved the mystery, locating the wreckage of both ships. "Having dived in the Channel Islands since my 20s," says Taylor, "it was one of those legends we all used to hear about. The history books agreed there had been a battle between a U-boat and a Q-ship and that they sunk each other. Nearly all serious local divers dreamed about finding them. It was the one that got away."

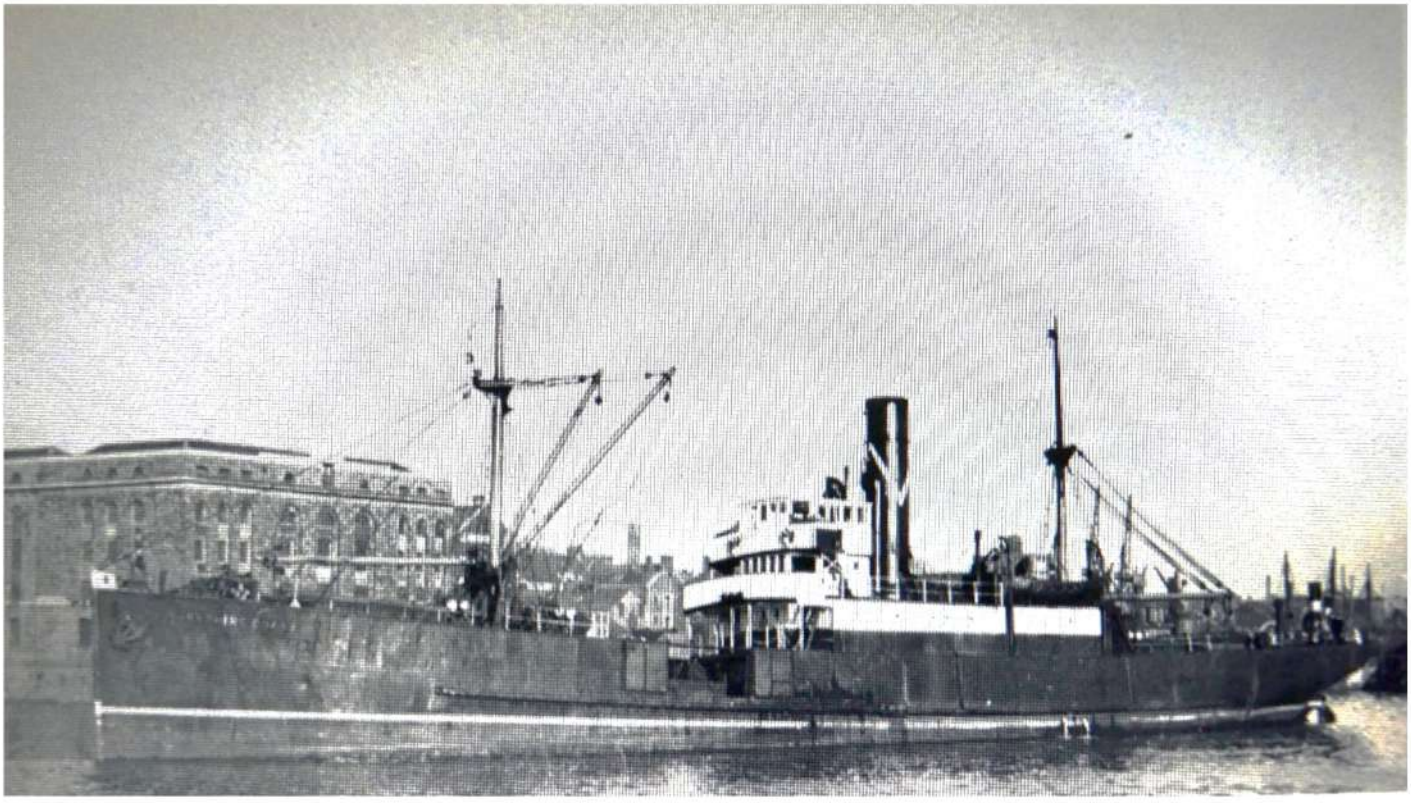
Taylor chronicled the search in a documentary titled '*The Hunt for Lady Olive & the German Submarine*', which premiered on the BBC last year and is now available to rent or buy in the United States.

Q-ships, the Royal Navy's secret weapon during World War I

By the time World War I began in July 1914, the world's leading 16 navies had a total of 400 submarines. Britain, however, was certain the war would be won on land. To John Fisher, head of the Royal Navy, Germany's 28 U-boats were little more than "toys" and "playthings." But Germany itself felt differently.

After the Royal Navy dotted the English Channel with mines and declared the whole North Sea a war zone in November 1914, Germany responded with a U-boat blockade of Britain. London had no answer to these hidden killers of the deep. By the fall of 1915, U-boats were sinking an average of 100,000 tons of British shipping a month, at twice the rate it took to build replacement vessels, according to Deborah Lake's '*Smoke and Mirrors: Q-Ships against the U-Boats in the First World War*'.

“We will frighten the British flag off the face of the waters,” Germany’s Kaiser, Wilhelm II, pledged, “and starve the British people until they, who have refused peace, will kneel and plead for it.” John Jellicoe, admiral of the British Grand Fleet, privately admitted that defeat and unfavourable terms of peace now seemed inevitable.



The *Yorkshire Coast*, sister ship to the *Lady Olive* Courtesy of Karl Taylor

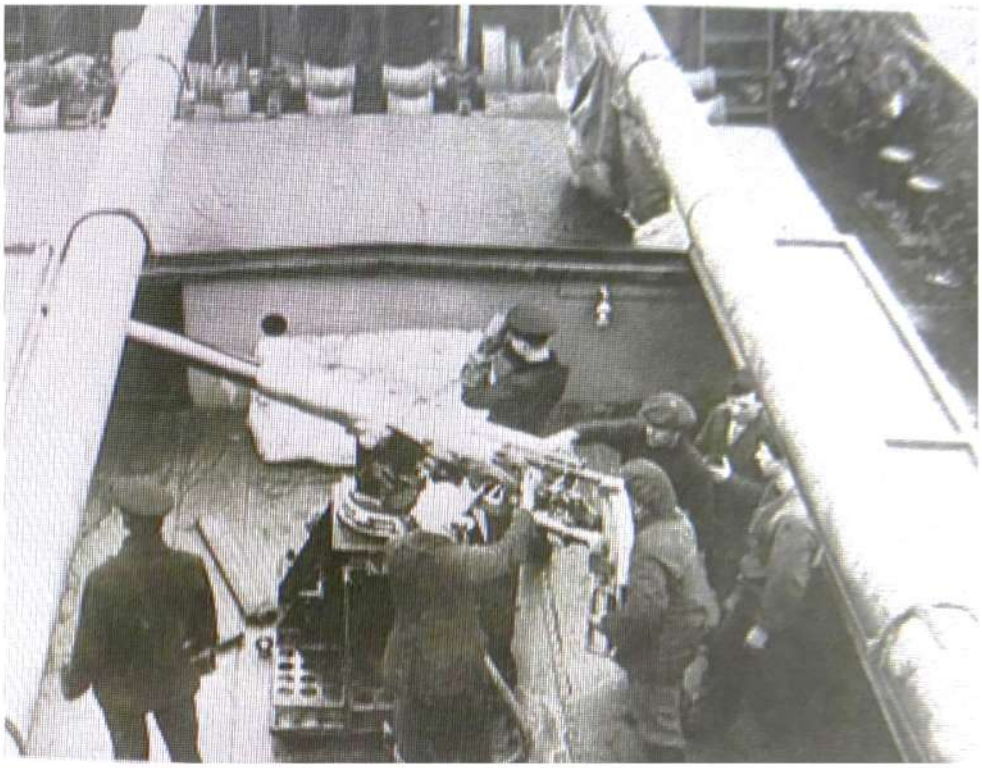
In addition to deploying hydrophones (underwater devices used to detect the sound of U-boats), the Navy introduced Q-ships as a secret weapon in the war of “Hush and Camouflage, Propaganda and Conscription,” as Captain Harold Auten described it in a 1919 book. British Navy personnel stationed in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea had seen how fast Arab dhows secretly armed with a three-pounder gun and a machine gun successfully defeated pirates and slave raiders. They adapted this idea for use in World War I.

From small schooners to 3,000-ton steamers, Q-ships looked like everyday traders. They were designed to engage in a deadly game of cat and mouse, luring in surfaced U-boats as British crews pretended to escape in “panic parties” before a German submarine commander blew up their ship. During the theatrical flight, a sailor might run for a lifeboat with his pet black cat under his arm. A steward would rush into the captain’s cabin and run out with top-secret baggage.

Some decoy ships were fitted with explosive-filled tin canisters, which were fired when a German shell “fell anywhere near … giving the impression of a direct hit,” according to Auten. “Panic steam pipes” were laid around engine room hatchways to create a similar effect, and tubs filled with dried seaweed were lit on fire to make it seem as though the ship were ablaze.

The panic party was a dangerous gamble designed to support the illusion that a ship had been abandoned. But the vessel’s real fighting force stayed hidden away, ready to go on the offensive when a submarine neared the trader. “They had to be taught to sit down or lie at their stations for hours on end, without giving the slightest indication that there was anybody at all on board the ship,” Auten wrote. “Everything depended upon concealment.”

As the enemy U-boat approached, the remaining crew of the beleaguered “trader” dropped the newly hinged sides of the ship and fired machine guns hidden among deck cargo and hen coops. In place of the red merchant marine flag, the Q-ship hoisted the white ensign of the Royal Navy, prompting the submarine to try and flee what Germany referred to as a “*U-Boot-Falle*,” or a “U-boat trap.”

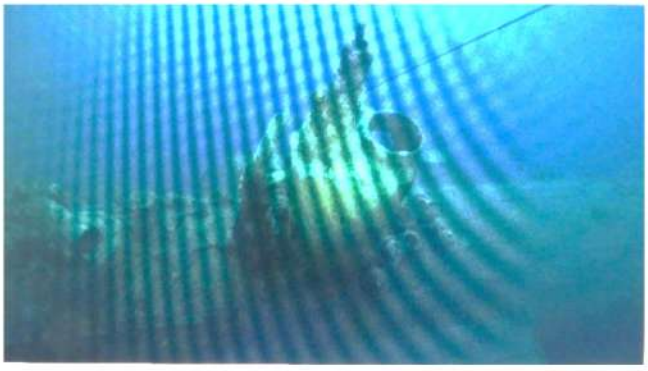


View of a hidden gun on a British Q-ship Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

Searching for the wrecks of 'UC-18' and the 'Lady Olive'

On February 1, 1917, Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare—a strategy it had suspended in response to outcry over the 1915 sinking of the '*Lusitania*', a British ship that was carrying both Allied munitions and passengers from the neutral U.S. For Q-ships like the '*Lady Olive'*, whose crew pocketed double pay to account for the great risks they took, the reversal marked the most dangerous turn in the tide of the war at sea.

"U-boat commanders were no longer restricted by 'prize rules' and could sink an enemy merchantman on sight," says Sondhaus. "The Q-ship ruse worked only when the U-boats were constrained by having to surface, properly identify the target and allow the crew to abandon ship." Overnight, the decoy ships' tactics had to change. Now, the only way to convince a U-boat commander to surface was to deliberately take a torpedo strike and play dead.



The remains of *UC-18*'s periscope © Karl Taylor

Remains of *UC-18*'s conning tower © Karl Taylor

"Britain was being starved and was on the verge of surrender, as 90 percent of its food, ammunition and raw materials came from overseas," says Tomas Termote, who served as the Taylor team's maritime archaeologist. "The UC class of submarine was the most effective weapon at sea, besides the sea mine, to destroy Allied shipping. Germany concentrated more and more effort in its U-boat fleets as the final weapon to defeat Great Britain."

Taylor started researching the '*Lady Olive'* and '*UC-18'* because "for divers, the idea of discovering a missing U-boat is about as fascinating as it gets." He adds, "As we dug deeper into the story, we realized there was a lot of contention over what may or may not have happened, and it felt that if the crew of the

‘*Lady Olive’* did sink ‘*UC-18’*, they would not have felt vindicated in their success as it was questioned by historians for decades. This project was an opportunity to discover the truth.”

That truth, however, was “obscured by ‘*UC-18*’s vanishing act; by another warship, HMS ‘*Medea’*, claiming it sank the submarine; and by the crews of Q-ships sometimes reporting a kill to claim the Admiralty’s bounty of £1,000” (about $73,000 today), says Guernsey maritime historian John Paul Fallaize.

If Taylor’s team could confirm the old story that the two vessels wiped each other out, it would make for a unique history, the only known “incident where both a U-boat and Q-ship sank during a brief naval battle,” says Termote.

The more the team researched in the English and French archives and dived, though, the more they doubted the submarine would ever be found. “All we knew for sure was that the ‘*Lady Olive’* sank ‘somewhere,’ due to the undeniable accounts of the crew’s rescue,” says Taylor.

In Cornwall, Taylor tracked down the great-niece of James Simpson, a wireless operator on the ‘*Lady Olive’*. She had inherited her great-uncle’s wartime diary, which held a trove of details on the battle.

When the German submarine caught up to the ‘*Lady Olive’* early on February 19, 1917, it fired two shots, Simpson recounted in his diary. One struck the engine room, while the other whistled over the ship. Then the U-boat “got the greatest surprise,” Simpson continued, “and down went ports and she got a salvo into her. Chap in conning tower blown to bits, also man on gun. Conning tower almost blown to bits. She then [sank], being holed in four or five places.”

As Fallaize explains, “The problem for ‘*UC-18’* was that the ‘*Lady Olive’* was unusually strongly armed with one four-inch gun and another four guns of 12-pound calibre—more heavily than most decoy ships’ three guns.”

James Simpson, a sailor whose diary provided vital insights on the encounter between the *Lady Olive* and *UC-18*
Courtesy of Karl Taylor

Re-energized by the diary, the team’s underwater surveys focused on the historical coordinates of the battle. “We did find wreckage there,” says Taylor, “but it turned out to be a different ship called the ‘*Dromore*’. When we surveyed even farther out, there was nothing not already known to divers.”

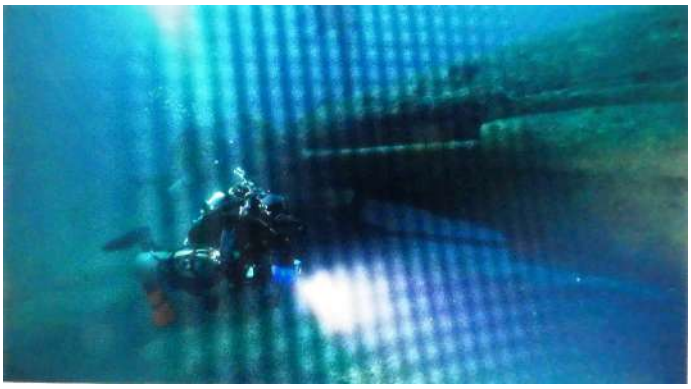
The old wartime tale wasn’t stacking up, and the growing evidence worried Taylor. Logbooks indicated that the French destroyer ‘*Dunois*’ and the fishing boat ‘*Sirius’* rescued the crew of the ‘*Lady Olive’* near the French archipelago of Sept-Îles, around 50 miles southwest of Guernsey. Given that location, the Roches-Douvres Lighthouse on the French coast, whose beam had a radius of 20 nautical miles, should have been visible to survivors and rescuers. Since none of them had mentioned the key landmark, Taylor suspected the battle must have taken place even farther west in the English Channel, beyond the sight of land.

After simulating the likely southward movements of the *Lady Olive*’s lifeboats, the dive team pushed increasingly west. With a vast deep-water area to search, team member Richard Keen, a legendary diver who previously discovered several Roman wrecks off the coast of Guernsey, decided to check with local fishermen to see if any had snagged trawler gear on an underwater obstruction.

“Fishermen have fished every inch of the seabed around these islands with nets, dredges, crab pots and long lines,” says Keen, “and have all lost expensive gear on wrecks. They record and pass on the information, so their friends don’t have the same misfortune. All you must do is find the right fisherman.”

With a series of new spots on the seabed to investigate, some in French waters, the team headed 40 miles west of the traditional battle zone. Because of the depth and challenging logistics involved, Taylor decided

to go low-tech by dropping a camera onto a possible wreck target rather than deploying human divers. “This is going to be a bit hit and miss,” he says in the documentary, “and there’s a very real risk of snagging this and losing the lot.”



Diver Nathan Martel inspects the stern of the wreck of *UC-18*. © Karl Taylor

Remains of a boiler in what is believed to be the wreck of the *Lady Olive* © Karl Taylor

The first two camera drops revealed nothing. But on the third drop, the steel plates of what looked like a submarine flashed into view. At another fisherman’s snag a few miles to the north, the team’s equipment got caught on the seabed. Video footage recovered from the camera showed something long and tubular in the shadows—a U-boat.

Taylor rushed the data to Termote in Germany. The maritime archaeologist identified shell impact holes in the upper starboard of the hull’s ballast tank and significant battle damage to the base of the submarine’s conning tower. He also spotted a stamp on one of the propellers of the kind used by the Imperial German Navy. “You can see that the metal is bent inward,” Termote says. “This is a kind of damage that could be fatal to a U-boat, stopping her from submerging anymore.”

Just a few miles away from the wreck of the submarine, the team made the deepest dive of the project, discovering an upside-down ship of the correct era and size, with two boilers and plating that matched the ‘*Lady Olive*’s’. (Q-ships often turned over when sinking because the added weight of their secret guns made them top-heavy.) Though many clues still lie buried under tons of wreckage, including the telltale guns, Taylor and his colleagues are confident that they have discovered the final resting place of the ‘*Lady Olive’* and ‘*UC-18’*.

The legacy of the British Q-ships

During World War I, more than 200 Q-ships—and perhaps as many as 400—roamed the seas. Nobody knows for sure because the experiment was a secret, even to some members of Britain’s Board of Admiralty. By the war’s end in November 1918, these mysterious decoys had fought around 70 engagements, sinking no more than 11 U-boats, according to ‘*Smoke and Mirrors’*. Comparatively, U-boats destroyed 44 Q-ships. Ultimately, it was improved sea mines and convoys, which provided safety in numbers that defeated Germany’s submarine warfare.

The success of the Q-ship program should not be judged by submarine sinkings, but in how it disrupted the rules of war, Auten argued in his book. German U-boats were forced to fire, lose thousands of shells and waste time rearming back in port. In the eyes of the British public, each member of the Q-ships’ crews were “another St. George or Beowulf,” wrote Lake in *Smoke and Mirrors*. “Every man was a hero who fought sea dragons.”

Though the Q-ship idea was ingenious, says Sondhaus, “they probably did more harm than good.” Led by “eager and aggressive” young lieutenants, U-boat crews operated under the German tradition of *Auftragstaktik*, “which allowed for great flexibility in accomplishing a mission,” Sondhaus adds. “No one was ever reprimanded for being overzealous. … Countless merchantmen were sunk on the assumption that they might be Q-ships, without proper protocols being followed.”

Now that the legend has been confirmed and the wrecks discovered, French authorities have designated ‘*UC-18’* a no-dive war grave. “I hope that the sites remain undisturbed,” says Taylor, “but all wrecks eventually deteriorate over time, and it will likely suffer further damage from trawlers in the future. Currently, the submarine is in excellent condition given its age, one of the best preserved underwater.”

Guernsey, meanwhile, continues to hold rich pickings for wreck hunters. As Keen says, “A great deal of our sunken history is yet to be found, much of it in deeper water.”