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New light shed on riddle of the sands

IN THE depths of the North Sea lies a puzzle.

The wreckage of a freighter called the *Malvina* lies scattered on the seabed in the swirling waters off Flamborough Head – on top of a First World War German U-boat.

For years people thought the two ships had gone down locked in a deadly embrace after the U-boat torpedoed her enemy. But new research suggests quite a different story.

Last summer a team of American divers travelled to Yorkshire to see if they could shed more light on the mystery along with divers from Scarborough British Sub Aqua club. The result is a one-hour documentary for the History Channel on TV – *Deepsea Detectives*.

History books say that the U-107, a torpedo-laden fighting machine designed to harass coastal shipping, was sunk by armed trawlers off Hayburn Wyke, near Ravenscar, in the early hours of July 27 1918. Depth charge after depth charge rained down on the U-boat and up floated the usual tell-tale signs – oil and air bubbles.

Intelligence officials noted the discovery of a decomposed headless corpse floating in the water the following morning as a further sign that the U-107 had sunk.

However 65 years later salvors made a surprising discovery – the U-107 was in fact buried under the scattered wreckage of the steam ship *Malvina*, 18 miles to the south off Flamborough Head.

One of the 14 survivors from the *Malvina*, which went down in just three minutes, thought she had been torpedoed. But the investigation has revealed a number of different and potentially conflicting theories.

Two divers from Scarborough, Andrew Jackson and Carl Racey, who have made a string of discoveries off the East Coast, were contacted by the man known as the Jacques Cousteau of American diving, John Chatterton, to take part in the documentary.

As luck had it when the Americans were in town underwater conditions were so bad it was almost a matter of groping round in the dark, and there were only one or two clearer dives towards the end of their short stay.

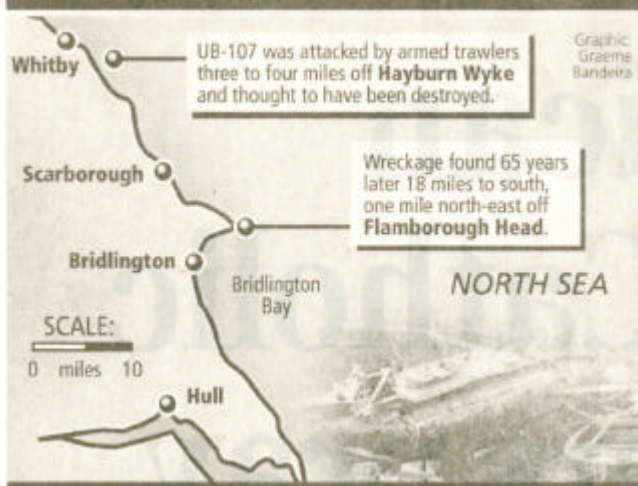
But the Scarborough group had dived the wrecks 10 times earlier in the season, capturing some clear video images and helping locate crucial radio masts on the U-boat, which would answer some of the questions nagging researchers.

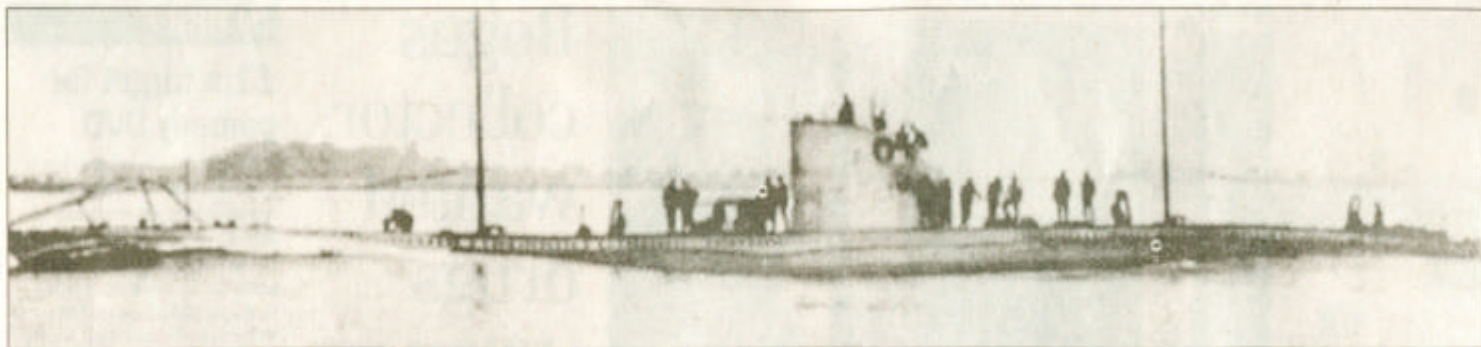
For a U-boat to signal back to base the two masts had to be manually operated into position, leaving it extremely vulnerable and certainly in no position to attack.

The discovery of the aft mast on the seabed at 90 degrees to the wreck ruled out the long-held theory that she torpedoed the *Malvina*.

Instead the divers believe that though crippled, the U-107 was carried along on underwater currents, surfac-

FIRST WORLD WAR MYSTERY





Historians and divers are trying to solve a First World War mystery involving a German submarine off the east coast of Yorkshire. **Alexandra Wood** reports



Team: Above: Divers and researchers off Flamborough Head - from left, Colin Bell, Dan Crowell, Andy Jackson, John Chatterton and Carl Racey. Left, the U-110, salvaged off Saltburn, Cleveland; below, the freighter *Malvina*. Top, a submarine of the type that was sunk.



ing in a vain bid to send a message back to base. Finally she arrived at a spot off Flamborough Head where all kinds of flotsam and jetsam are brought together by the conflicting currents.

Andy Jackson believes the U-boat snagged one of the numerous mines in the area

at some point in her passage and that finally put paid to the *Malvina*.

He said: "There are six days between the original attack on the sub and when the *Malvina* sank, long enough for the sub to drift on the seabed, till she reached what is a collection point for

debris, everything from shopping trolleys to traffic cones - and subs."

Carl Racey has a different theory - as did the historians on the programme. But Mr Racey believes the programme - which has already aired on American TV and is now available through a web-

site - helps raise the profile of the coast and the largely forgotten part it played in the development of submarine warfare.

"People think submarine warfare went on in the Atlantic but it was pioneered on our coast. There are something like 700 steamship

wrecks on the Yorkshire coast - and half are from the First World War."

One thing however divers, historians and filmmakers are united on is that the mystery will continue to excite speculation and argument.

To buy the video see subseatv.com