

WRECK OF ELEUTHERIOS V.



DIVE LOG

Dive number: 2011
Date: 18 August 2015
Depth: 40.5 m
Duration: 40 min
Visibility: 30 m
Sea temperature: 23 C
Wind: Calm
Location: Cape Stavri, Naxos - exploratory dive.

NOTES

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

About fifteen years had passed since I first heard local divers discussing a wreck off Cape Stavri, north of Naxos. They described it as a German torpedo boat lying on the seabed, loaded with weapons and ammunition. They even spoke of a German motorcycle with a sidecar. My first research produced no historical event that could identify the wreck, and our dives in the area also failed to locate it.

Years passed. Information in *Whispering Death*, written by former Beaufighter navigator and gunner Lee Heide, together with my correspondence with him, suggested that the wreck might be a German Schnellboot. A vessel of this type was reportedly attacked by RAF 603 Squadron Beaufighters on 9 September 1944, driven onto the rocks of Naxos and sunk. That hypothesis, however, has never been confirmed by another source.

Late in 2009, while researching at the Naxos Historical Archive, I found a published entry from the diary of the Naxos Military Organisation in a 1945 issue of *Naxiaki Proodos*. The entry for 16 November 1943 stated:

“A German armed sailing vessel was torpedoed near Apollonas by a British submarine. Everyone was rescued except the Greek engineer. German armed vessels arrive and depart.”

This information was cross-checked and confirmed through several sources. The collected evidence illuminates another wartime event on Naxos during the German occupation.

On 6 November 1943 the British submarine **HMS Sportsman (P229)**, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Richard Gatehouse, DSC, RN, departed Haifa for a war patrol in the Aegean - its seventh patrol and sixth in the Mediterranean.

At dawn on 15 November 1943, the submarine sighted through its periscope the two-masted motor vessel **Eleutherios V.**, 70 gross register tons, Piraeus registry A-class no. 850, owned by Fr. Vrettos. Although it flew the Greek flag, the vessel had been requisitioned by German forces and carried an MG 15 anti-aircraft machine gun. Its cargo consisted mainly of small-arms ammunition bound for Astypalaia.

Eleutherios V. was proceeding close to shore from Naousa, Paros, toward northern Naxos. After tracking it for thirty-two minutes, Sportsman surfaced at 07:24 at approximately 37°13'N, 25°32'E, about 1,800 metres away. Twenty rounds of gunfire opened a hole below the waterline. Burning, Eleutherios V. sank within three minutes.



What remains of the stern section of Eleutherios V. The propeller and shaft are visible at left.



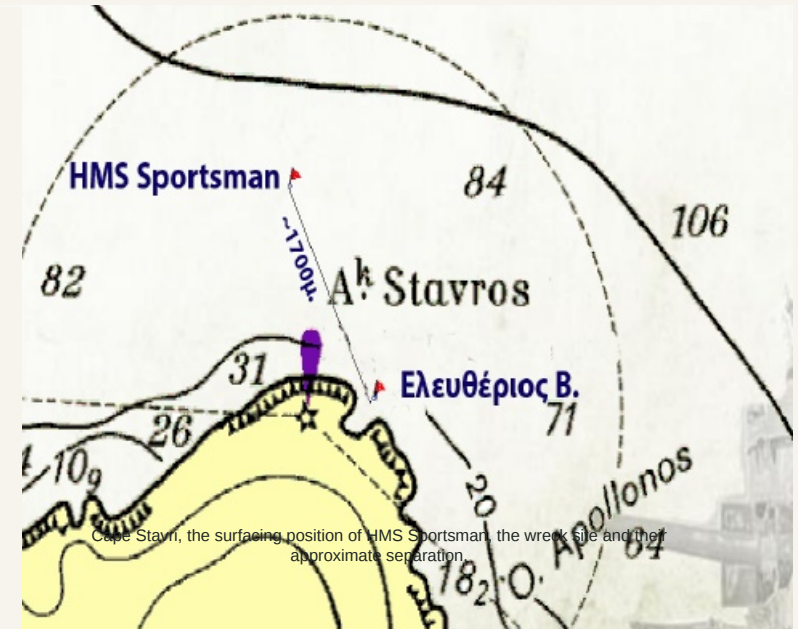
HMS Sportsman at anchor at Sheerness, North Kent, England.
© Imperial War Museum (FL 3755)

No precise German record of the sinking has been found, possibly because the Kriegsmarine was heavily engaged in the Battle of Leros (Operation TAIFUN). The only located entry comes from the war diary of the German 9th Torpedo Boat Flotilla. For 15 November 1943 it records that:

“An enemy submarine fired ten rounds against the Naxos naval command station at 06:25.”

The crew of Eleutherios V. consisted of Captain **Nikolaos Georgiou Karavokyarakos**, aged 49, from Koroni, Messinia; engineer **Georgios Margaritis**; sailors **Konstantinos Konstantaras**, **Georgios N. Karavokyarakos**, aged 18, and **Michail Foteinakos**, aged 55. Six German servicemen were also aboard.

Only engineer Georgios Margaritis lost his life. Konstantinos Konstantaras lost his left arm and two Germans suffered minor injuries. Everyone else reached the steep coast about 200 metres away, either rowing the tender or swimming.



The historical evidence had been established for some time. What remained was to find the wreck: everyone knew of it, but no one had coordinates. The descriptions we received repeatedly led only to barren sand and rock. I had nevertheless seen other divers' photographs and a weapon raised from the wreck and kept in a private collection. Stories also said that an earlier attempt to recover the motorcycle had moved it away from the main site.



Ammunition boxes and groups of mortar shells. At right, the shaft and propeller.

THE DIVE

18 August dawned bright and windless, the sea perfectly still - ideal conditions for proposing two exploratory dives to the experienced divers arriving at the centre. The group accepted enthusiastically. We prepared our equipment in silence, loaded the boat and reached Cape Stavri within ten minutes.

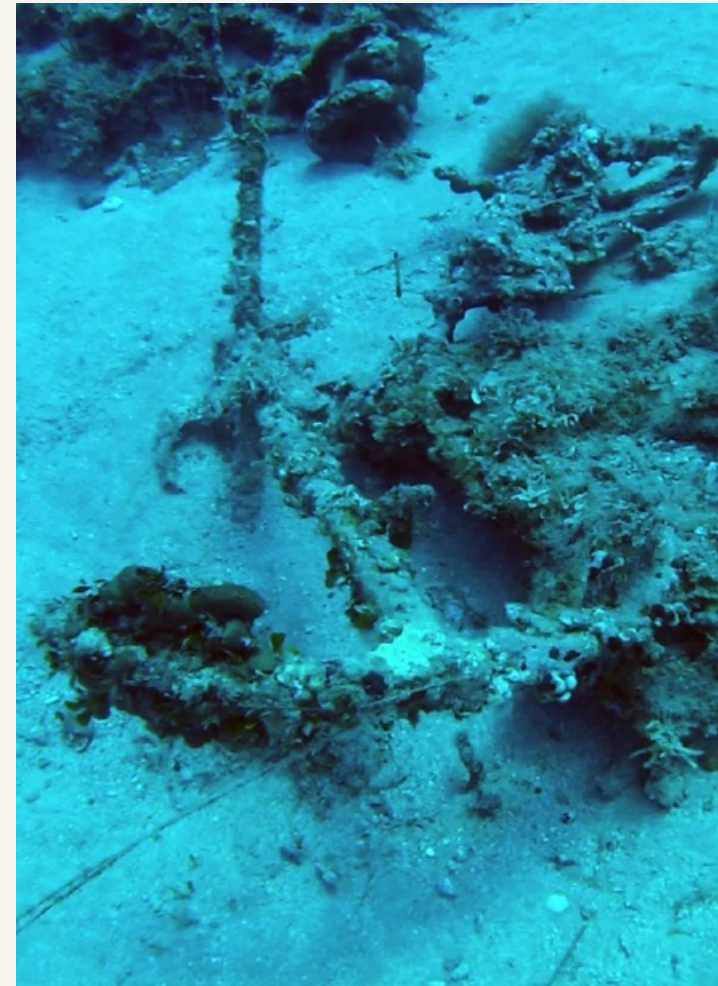
Vanessa was excited to join a search dive for the first time. Babis adjusted his camera to record the exploration, while Vasilis remembered our previous unsuccessful dives and remained cautiously optimistic.

The first-dive search plan was to drop the anchor in 39 metres and use its line for descent. We would stop in mid-water at 25 metres, where we could remain longer and keep visual contact with the seabed. From the descent line we planned to deploy a 120-metre search line, placing divers at 25-metre intervals and conducting a circular search.

After reviewing the locations already searched without success, we selected a new GPS position and dropped the anchor. We entered the water and a light current pushed us southwest. I descended first, followed by Vasilis, Vanessa and Babis, who filmed the dive. From ten metres the seabed became visible: large isolated rocks embedded in sand and coralligenous ground. Ten metres deeper I began to see details - one small box, then two, then three at the base of a rock, and farther away something resembling a helmet. Following the anchor line toward the chain, I saw more boxes and two barrels. This time we had been lucky. It was certainly the wreck.

I signalled a change of plan and we continued to 39 metres, where the main wreckage lay. Seventy-two years underwater, together with the submarine's gunfire, had erased the wooden hull. Only the propeller and shaft, engine debris and the traditional anchor remained to show that the vessel had been wooden. Two barrels - probably for fuel - ammunition boxes of several calibres and countless mortar shells were scattered across the site.

The wreck lies on an axis from 290° at the propeller to 110° at the anchor. The debris field is about 20 metres long and seven to eight metres wide. We found no motorcycle, but did recover a small plastic plate, probably from a radio, printed with the German phonetic alphabet. A second dive that day revealed nothing further. The historical documents and the physical evidence left no doubt: this was the wreck of **Eleutherios V**.



The propeller and shaft. Around the wreck lie ammunition boxes and mortar rounds.

DIVE TEAM

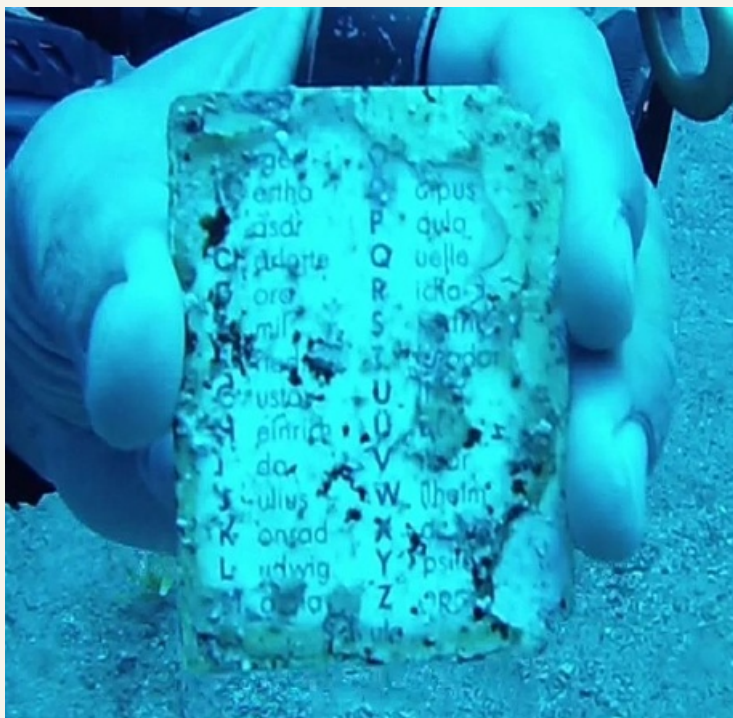
Vasilis Vintzilaos
Vanessa Evangelatou
Manolis Bardanis
Charalambos Spanidis

PHOTOGRAPHS

HMS Sportsman © Imperial War Museum (FL 3755)
Charalambos Spanidis

ABBREVIATIONS

DSC - Distinguished Service Cross
GPS - Global Positioning System
HMS - His Majesty's Ship
GRT - Gross Register Tonnage
Lt. Cdr. - Lieutenant Commander
RAF - Royal Air Force
RN - Royal Navy



SOURCES

- [1] Lee Heide, *Whispering Death: My Wartime Adventures*, Trafford Publishing, 2000, ISBN 155212387, pp. 198-199.
- [2] Naxiaki Proodos, Sunday 11 November 1945, p. 3, Naxos Historical Archive.
- [3] uboat.net/allies/commanders/968.html
- [4] Byron Tesapsides, *Die Kriegsmarine in der Agais im II. WK 1941-1944*, ISBN 978-960-930812, p. 137.
- [5] naval-history.net/xDKWD-Levant1943d.htm
- [6] HMS Sportsman war diary, ADM 199/1842, The National Archives, Kew.
- [7] Christos E. Dounis, *Shipwrecks in Greek Seas 1900-1950*, vol. I, Finattec, ISBN 960-86590-5-1, p. 209.
- [8] War diary of the 9th Torpedo Boat Flotilla; archive research by Dimitris Galon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Wooden component from a German Mauser Kar98k rifle, recovered from the wreck in the past.