

Scapa Flow – 21-29 June, 2019



Our 700 mile, 15 hour journey to The Orkneys began on 21 June 2019, but the real story began one hundred years ago to the day.

After four years of bloodshed in the Great War, Germany had surrendered, even though her navy – second only in size to that of Britain's – was undefeated. The German High Seas fleet, consisting of 74 battleships, battle cruisers and other warships, had been met by the Royal Navy in full force and escorted to a safe anchorage at Scapa Flow. There the skeleton crews of German sailors stayed on board, bored out of their minds, for 7 months. Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter had probably already made his mind up as to the likely outcome: it was to be a final two-fingered salute at Britain.

On the day it happened – 21 June 1919 - the British warships guarding the German fleet had gone out to sea to practise against torpedo attacks. The only ones afloat in Scapa Flow were a party of 400 Orkney schoolchildren out on a day trip, and an artist on a trawler, sketching the battleships. By all accounts it was a day very like the one that greeted us: the sun was shining, with a light breeze, and the water was about as flat calm as it could be. At 10.00, von Reuter sent out his coded message: 'paragraph eleven'. The crews went below, did what they had to and then began to abandon ship. It took some time and vain attempts were made by the little British guard ships to stop the whole process by firing on the German sailors and attempting to tow some of the stricken vessels. In all, nine Germans were killed. Scapa Flow was a mass of oil stains, floating rubbish, bubbles and small boats. By the time the British fleet returned from manoeuvres, it was too late. At least 50 of the German fleet's finest had settled on the seabed.

Our arrival coincided with the Scapa 100 initiative, which covered a number of projects to commemorate, map, protect, explore and tell the tale of the scuttling of the fleet a century ago. Our home in Stromness for 8 days was the [MV Valhalla](#), under the firm hand of skipper and owner Hazel Weaver and her crew, consisting of Vasco, the ever-so helpful and knowledgeable deck-hand, and Paddy, the cook, whose dishes never failed to provide the calories needed.

[BUDC divers](#): Julian Avis, Stuart McKendrick, Mark Swan, Milton Molina, Steve Spurgin and yours truly. [Dive Video Link](#)



From left to right: Mark, Steve, Charlie, Milton, Stuart and Julian

Our dive diary went something like this:

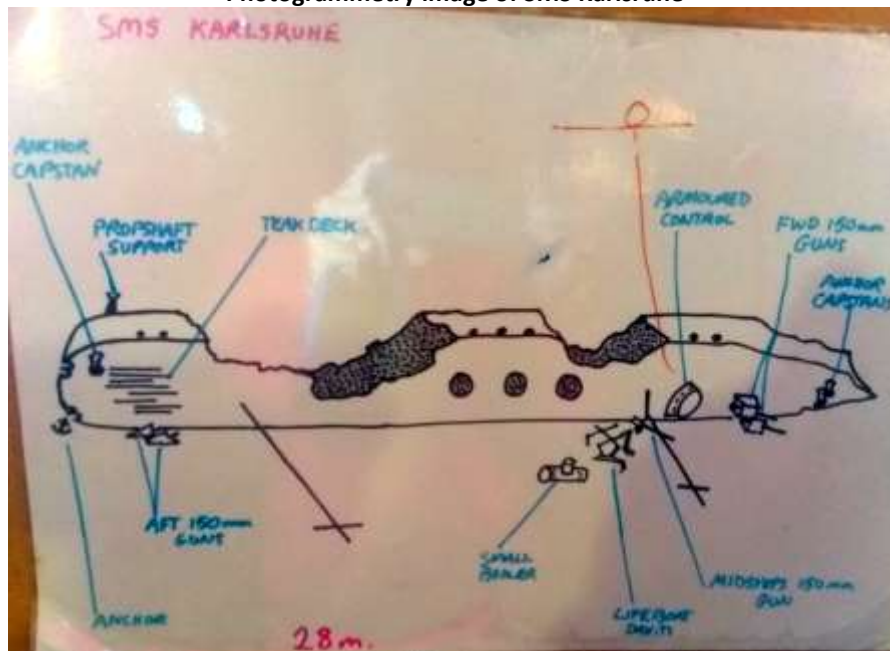
Day 1.

SMS Karlsruhe: [SMS stands for *Seine Majestat Schiff*, the equivalent of the British HMS]

- a cruiser of the Königsberg II-class, displacing 5,440 tonnes
- launched 31/1/1916; sank 21/06/1919 at 3.50 pm
- fitted with geared turbines, producing a massive 45,000 horsepower to reach speed of 28 knots
- could carry 120 mines, launched from ramps on each side of the stern
- conventional armament, including eight 150mm guns and two torpedo tubes
- depth 24-27m; dive time 46 mins; nitrox 32%



Photogrammetry image of SMS Karlsruhe



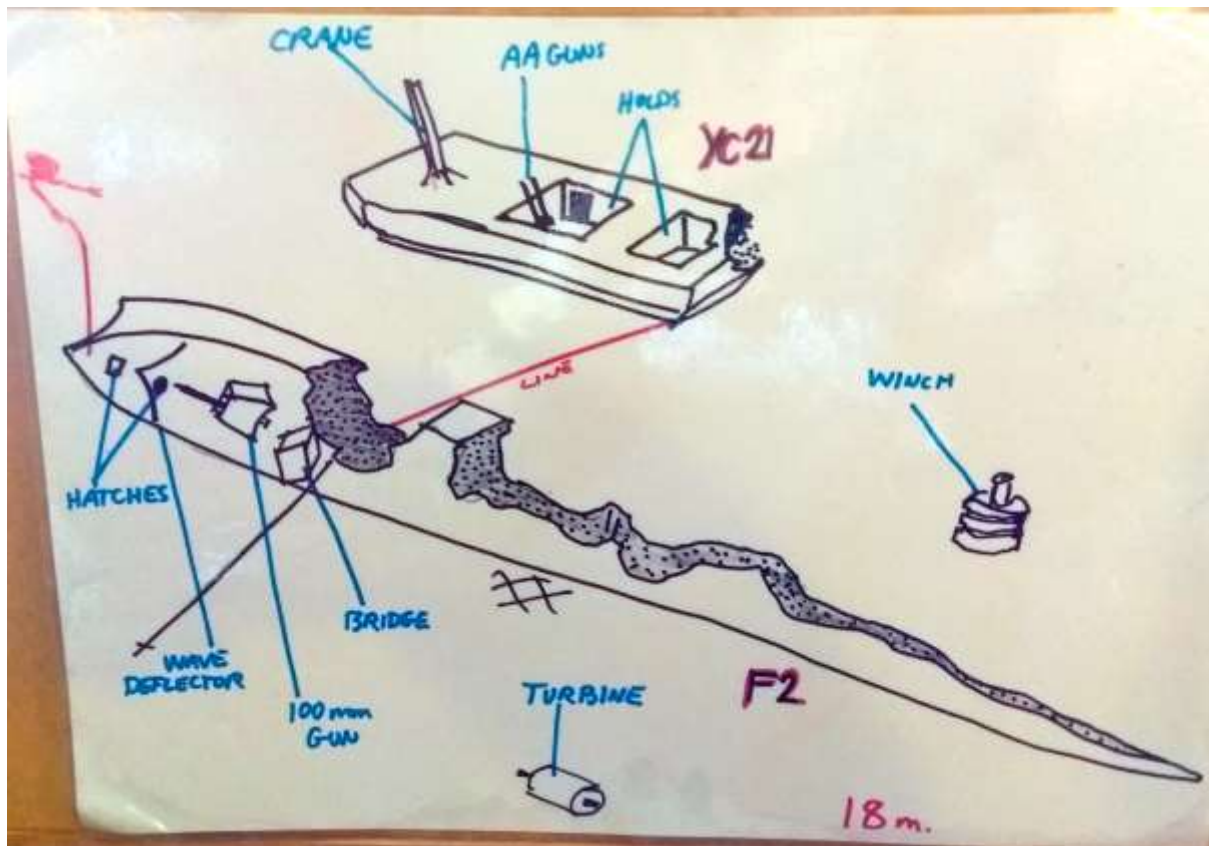
Briefing diagram of SMS Karlsruhe

F2 and Barge: not part of the scuttled German fleet. The F2 was an armed light cruiser used in World War 2 to patrol harbours. It sank in 1944. In 1967 a towing barge had begun to take its guns off and was slowly towing it to shallower waters. Moored above it overnight, the mighty storm of 1967 hit it and swamped the barge, sending it to the bottom. The two vessels lie 20m apart, with the rope still attaching them both.

Depth 17m; dive time 47 minutes



Photogrammetry image of the F2 and Barge



Briefing diagram of F2 and Barge

In the evening we attend a virtual reality demonstration, allowing us to explore various wrecks in 3D in the dry, and learning about how the wrecks and items found on board are being catalogued using photogrammetry, the science of making reliable measurements by the use of multiple photographs.

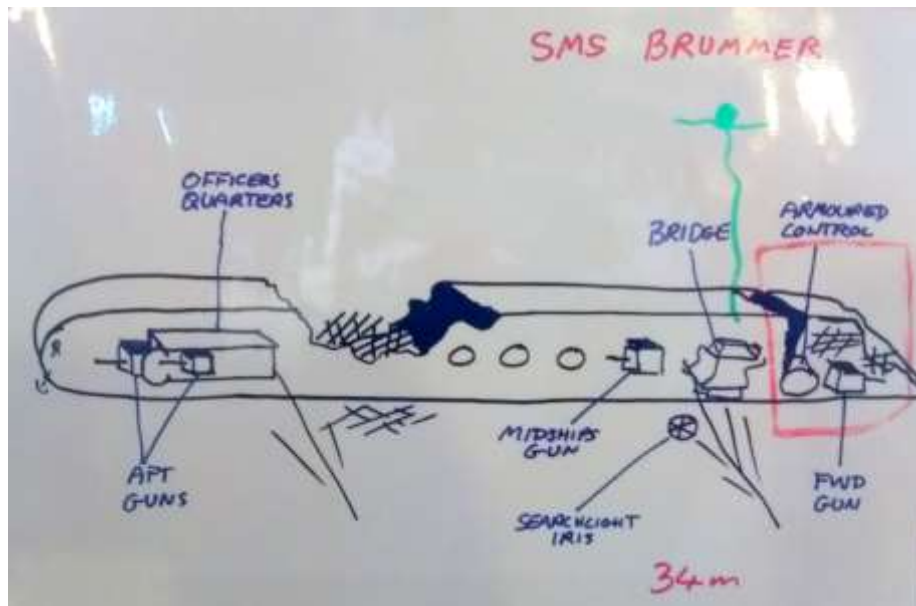
Day 2

SMS Brummer:

- a fast, mine-laying cruiser of the Bremse class, which carried up to 400 mines and was capable of laying one mine every 30 seconds
- launched 11/12/1915; sank 21/06/1919 at 2.30 pm
- range 5,800 miles at 12 knots; max. speed 28 knots
- in 1917, along with her sister ship SMS Bremse, she intercepted a convoy on its way to Shetland, sinking the destroyers HMS Mary Rose and Strongbow and nine neutral Scandinavian vessels, showing unreasonable cruelty to those in the water by firing on them
- depth 32m; dive time 43 mins; nitrox 33%



Photogrammetry image of SMS Brummer



Briefing diagram of SMS Brummer

SMS Dresden

- a light cruiser of the Dresden II class
- launched 25/04/1917; sank 21/06/1919 at 11.30 am
- depth 33-36m; I missed out on this dive due to a sore back



SMS Dresden at sea

In the evening we attend a lecture given by Rod Macdonald, author of 'Dive Scapa Flow'.

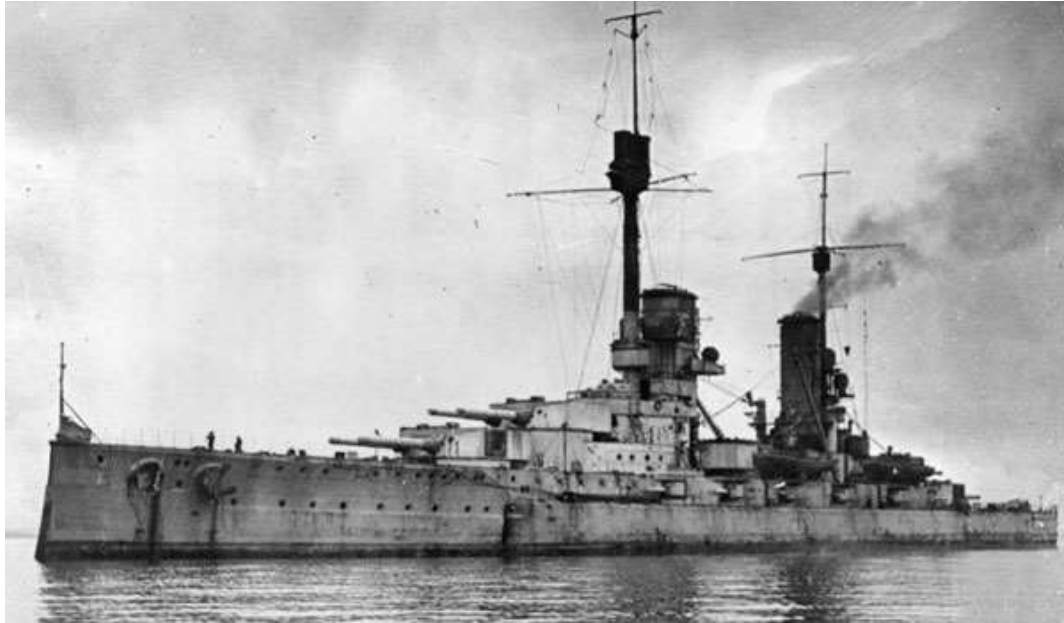
Day 3

SMS Kronprinz Wilhelm

- a battleship of the König class, built to rival Britain's Dreadnought battleship, displacing 26,000 tonnes
- launched 21/02/1914; sank 21/06/1919 at 1.15 pm
- length 175m; beam 29m
- range 8,000 miles at 12 knots; max speed 21 knots
- armament: 10 x 12", 14 x 5.9", 10 x 3.4" guns; 5 x 20" torpedo tubes
- armour belt: each gun protected by a 14" steel turret, which rotated with the gun; the conning tower was protected by 12" of steel
- we descended to the seabed to view one of the biggest guns accessible to recreational divers
- depth 37m; dive time 42 minutes; nitrox 29%



Photogrammetry image of SMS Kronprinz Wilhelm



SMS Kronprinz Wilhelm on patrol

UB 116: not part of the scuttled German fleet. This German U-boat had set out in Oct 1918 for Scapa Flow to penetrate the harbour's defences and to torpedo any British ships inside. At Hoxa Sound entry was protected by underwater hydrophones, which could pick up engine noise; mines sat on the seabed, which could be electronically detonated from a hut ashore. The UB 116 was the only U-boat to be sunk in this way.

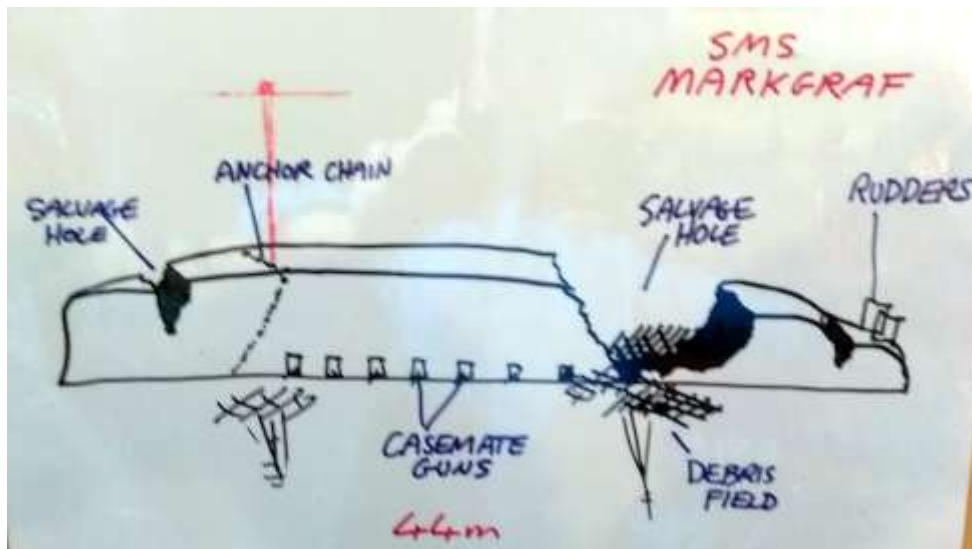
In 1969 explosives were used to break her into small pieces for salvage. However, there were live torpedoes on board and all ten exploded at once with such force that the British naval boat overseeing the process became the U-boat's final victim.

Depth 29m; dive time 45 minutes; nitrox 37%

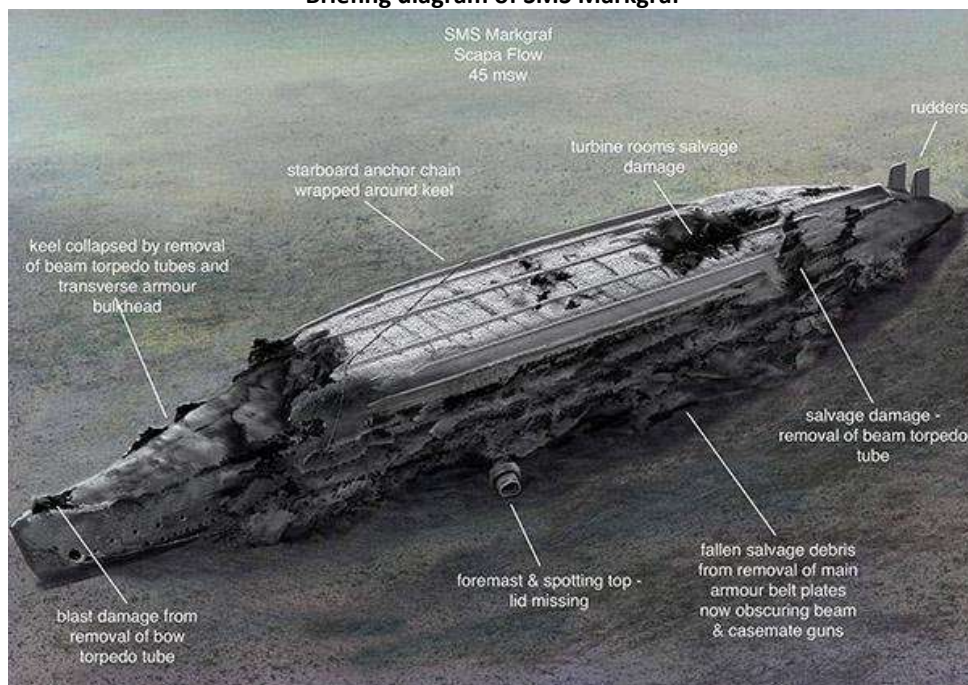
Day 4

SMS Markgraf

- the second of three König class battleships still on the seabed, regarded as "the jewel in the Scapa crown"
- the two huge rudders, 3.6m high, provide a prominent feature and photo opportunity at the stern
- the shot is attached to the anchor chain, which wrapped itself round the hull when she sank and turned upside down
- launched 04/06/1913; sank 21/06/1919 at 4.45 pm
- depth 40 m; dive time 28 minutes; nitrox 26%



Briefing diagram of SMS Markgraf



SMS Markgraf from Rod Macdonald's book 'Dive Scapa Flow'

V83

- German torpedo boat destroyer
- belonging to the V-67 class – highly effective and playing a much bigger role in the battle of Jutland in 1916 than the huge battleships
- torpedoes were launched from tubes mounted on the deck, ejected by compressed air
- on her scuttling a Royal Navy party managed to beach the ship on the east shore of Rysa Little
- her bow lies in 5-8m, her stern in 11-14m; only the latter is intact
- a relaxing, easy dive with plenty of kelp and luminaria stalks to root around in
- max depth 16m; dive time 62 minutes



Looking inside the V83

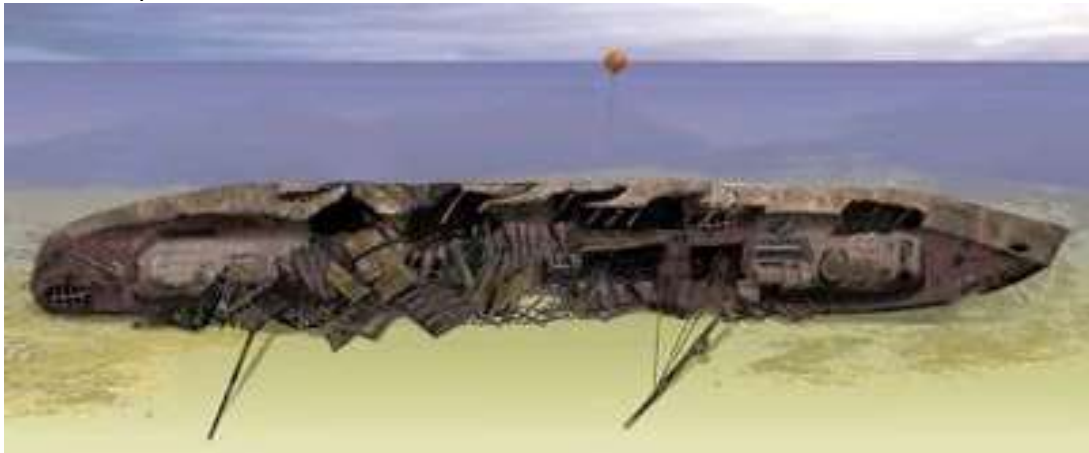


BC. It is Europe's most complete Neolithic village.

Day 6

SMS Cöln

- second dive on this excellent wreck
- past the discarded gun shield and down through a hole for a delightful swim-thro', viewing the barbette mounting holes and swimming over the armoured control towards the bridge, where we exit, close to the 150 mm gun
- continuing towards the stern we see the lifeboat davits above us and we pass the armoured ventilator, the torpedo tube and the 88 mm high elevation gun
- max depth 32m; dive time 45 minutes; nitrox 33%



SMS Cöln

SMS Karlsruhe

- our final dive and second on this wreck
- we see the armoured control, the midships 150mm gun, a conger eel and swim the entire length and back again, searching inside the two blasted areas

Next morning we catch the 6.30 am ferry, disembarking at 8.00. Thirteen hours later we arrive in Coulsdon. Thanks for a great trip, everyone!

C. Taylor