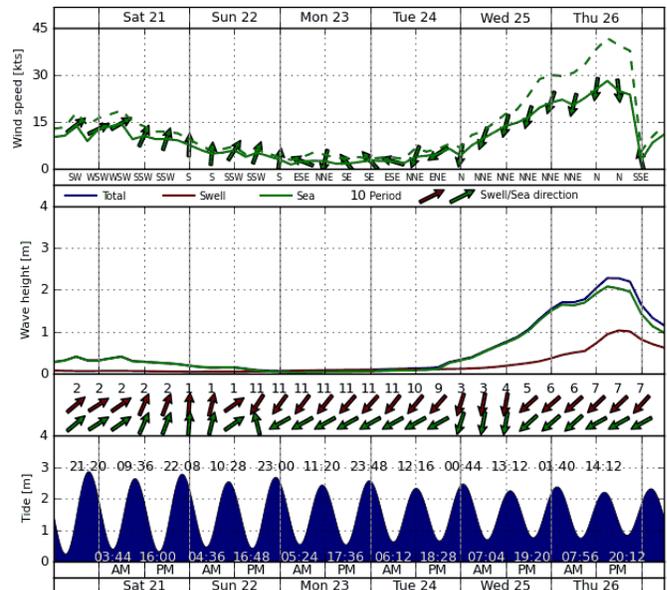


Return to the Minato Maru; trip Report: 22nd May 2011

Jamie Obern

The last time I explored this wreck the visibility was little more than 1m – not great for seeing a wreck for the first time, especially when you know it is a popular fishing spot and probably covered in abandoned monofilament line. However, we saw enough to know we wanted to go back and with swell map predicting almost perfect conditions on Sunday we grabbed the opportunity. Of course for Mike and Christian organising a dive at the last minute on a beautiful Sunday wasn't without certain complications – but I have to admire their bravery. Both of them completed significant amounts of DIY on the Saturday in order to obtain their passes for the Sunday. My worry is that both Sian and Gaynor now know how much can be achieved every weekend with the proper motivation – but then that's not my problem. As long as Mel is keen to go diving then life is easy.



Our trip out to the wreck was again courtesy of Mike and his boat 'Elle P'. It took us about 30mins and although we had good marks from our last trip it took us a bit longer to find the wreck this time. (Tip for others considering diving this site – give yourself plenty of time before slack water.) But we did pin-point it in the end and successfully set up our shot line – just before half-a-dozen small fishing boats descended on the site. The plan was for Mel and me to dive first, with Christian and Mike going after we had surfaced. We kitted up quickly, keen to make the most of high-water-slack, before the dirtier water from the harbour started to flow out again. As I kitted up I looked over the side – just like last time the visibility at the surface looked to be about 4-5m – but I also remembered how previously we had hit a layer of brown sludge at 9m – fingers crossed we didn't have the same trouble again.



The water was a pleasant 18 degrees (one of the reasons I left the UK) and there was no current. Mel and I descended; we went past 9m with the visibility remaining at 4-5m and kept going. Unlike last time there were no thermoclines as we got deeper and wonderfully the vis. remained ok all the way to the seabed – which was sand rather than boat – not so good. Where was the wreck? Thankfully in the reasonable conditions we could see the shadow of the hull, right on the edge of our vision. Mel and I had the same thought, had this slightly awry shot line been on our previous trip we would never have found the wreck. To make life easier for Mike and Christian we dragged the shot over to the wreck and then started our dive – very excited to be able to see the wreck clearly and really appreciate how intact it is.

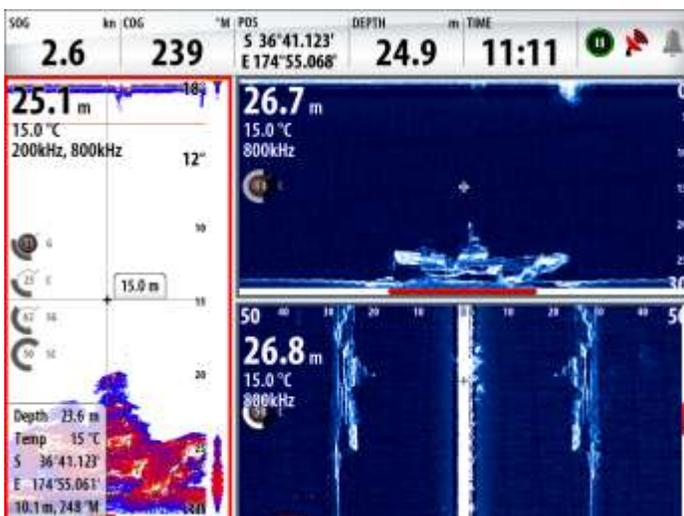
Our shot had landed right at the bow of the boat, which makes planning a tour really easy, so after a few photos of the bow we headed off aft along the port rail. The first interesting area we came to was a covered cabin/working area halfway between the bow and the wheel house. Although there were quite a few lines strewn about there is enough space to swim into the covered area and turn around comfortably. Whilst Mel explored I waited outside with the video camera, trying to get some footage as she used her light to pick out objects in the gloom. Next we headed to the wheel house where again Mel ventured inside and I took video from the outside. Just like last time we had a good look at the hatchway leading further into the ship, but as we were still using back-mounted cylinders it wasn't an option. (Next time.....)



The bow

From the wheel house we continued aft along the port rail, getting side-tracked by some big barrels lying on the seabed which we hadn't spotted last time in the dreadful vis. (Floats from the original attempted salvage?) From here we reached the stern area where there is an open doorway leading into a bigger covered area, which was probably where the catch was dealt with. We remembered from last time that there was a large opening right at the stern of the ship so I swam into the covered area and waited to film Mel as she swam in from the stern. Unfortunately the vis. was a little milkier inside (not my finning – honest) so I didn't get much usable footage in this area.

By this time we had been down for almost 20 minutes so it was time to turn around and head back towards the shot line. We drifted up and over the wheel house, avoiding a huge tangle of lines and cruised along the starboard rail. After 25 minutes on the bottom the current still hadn't started to pick up so we had an easy trip up the shot line and back to the boat. Strangely Mike and Christian didn't believe us when we suggested they might prefer heading back to the marina for a beer rather than go diving.



So what's next? Next time I'm definitely taking side-mount gear and tackling the inside of the wreck – as long as we don't have 1m vis. again. I'm also going to take much bigger video lights so my pictures don't look so green.

Finally a big thank you to Mike for providing his boat again and also to Navico who gave us this side-scan sonar image of the wreck – if you were wondering just how intact it is – completely is the answer. Until next time.....