

## **Diving HMS Repulse & Prince of Wales**

An abstract from my Journal  
By Mathew Partridge

October 10<sup>th</sup> 2003 I arrived in Kuala Lumpur International Airport only to find my dive bags are on route to Kota Kinabalu wherever that is? No one wants to help and I am getting a little stressed to say the least. Finally a helpful Malay fellow informs me there is no big problem with my luggage as it will be sent to KL on the flight back the following morning, they will then express forward it to my hotel in the city, if only it would have been that easy in the first place. Having spent a little over 6 months traveling and diving around Asia I have become accustomed to things not happening on time but when I have the journey to Tioman the following day there's not much room for error.

The equipment did turn up as expected and all in tact, Amazing. After a day in KL spent visiting the sites I'm ready to head to the airport to get my connecting flight to Tioman. Followed by a short boat ride across to the island and we are there. It should have been time to relax and grab a well earned beer but that was not going to be the case, the dive shop I booked with forgot to book me any accommodation and as it was the weekend all the locals had landed and taken anything not cockroach infested or open air. So it's back on the boat to the mainland for a night in the Berjaya Resort. The following day was spent meeting the staff at the dive centre and sorting out the logistics for the dives to the wrecks. I will not go into too much detail but I was not impressed with the dive operator who clearly didn't believe in customer service. Having organized the gases and additional equipment required for the trip it was back to the mainland as still no accommodation on the island.

3am the following day and its time to set sail in time for a early morning dive on the HMS Repulse, a small converted fishing boat was to be our diving station for the day. A couple of extra hours sleeping on the deck and it was time to start getting ready to dive.

So far up until now I was not impressed but I just kept on thinking that the reason for the trip was not for a holiday on the beach but to visit one of the worlds best wreck sites HMS Repulse & Prince of Wales. Battleships I had read so much about.

These vessels were the lead players in the operation Churchill mounted to deter Japan from entering WW2. Tragically on December the 10<sup>th</sup> 1941 the operation went sadly wrong when Japanese torpedo bombers found the convoy and sunk both these ships with a huge loss of life.

.

Both were huge British Battleships, with the Prince of Wales being the larger of the two vessels. The Repulse our first dive site now lies on her Port side in a maximum depth of 55 meters with her starboard side being at 38 meters. The dives on HMS Repulse were planned using normal air for bottom mix with nitrox 32 and 80 for decompression. I had a planned bottom time of 45 minutes followed by my decompression back to the surface. I was kind of looking forward to the decompression as well as I had been told by friends that the visibility is usually great and a good aerial view of the wreck can be enjoyed while decompressing.

As the morning sun rose we all geared up and got ready to dive, final checks completed and in we went. Composed on the surface I take my first glimpse a silhouette of the vessel lying eerily on the bottom. The decent is a free falling one that always gets me excited kind of like that a sky diver must get the moment they jump from a plane free falling to the ground. Further down its time to hit the breaks adding air to my wing to slow the now quite fast descent to the wreck. Once neutrally buoyant I was in total amazement I have never had the experience of diving something just that huge. The Repulse is 794 feet in Length has a 90 feet Beam and a total displacement of 32,000 tons. She was loaded with 6, 15-inch main guns and 17, 4-inch secondary guns as well as 5 machine gun & 8 Torpedo Tubes.

Having taken a look at the ships prop it was time to start the long swim along the starboard side of the wreck at this same time one of the other divers in the group came flying past on an underwater scooter, why didn't I have one of those? The planned bottom time of 45 minutes flew past; it was a truly amazing dive on the wreck of Repulse. I had not planned any penetration on this dive out of respect for both the families and the lost crewmembers aboard.

Having only seen a fraction of the wreck during my planned bottom time, I can only image that conducting many dives on this wreck would allow one to really enjoy this magnificent underwater museum. My long awaited quest to dive this magnificent wreck has now been partially fulfilled I will for sure come back to execute further dives in the years to come. Its now time to begin my ascent to first decompression stop, as I ascend I cannot help thinking about all the killed and injured that were aboard this ship something that happens to me often when I undertake dives of this nature an overwhelming sense of gratitude to those that lost their lives in the battles fought during wars around the world. The long decompression passed effortlessly and I soon find myself climbing the small ladders of my rustic dive vessel. Once on-board I take a few moments to reminisce and relax then its time to de-kit and take in some refreshment and food. The plan that day was to make a further dive on the wreck after lunch but unfortunately one of the other divers was not well and showing sign of decompression illness. The decision to call the next dive and head home was a disappointing one but in the interest of safety it was a call that had to be made.

The ride back to land took around six hours and conditions were not that great, the wind had picked up and the small dive boat did not journey well in choppy sea. On arriving back to land all seemed to have improved with the fellow suffering potential DCI he was advised to seek medical attention but insisted he was Ok and left for his room. I too washed off my equipment at the dive centre and once again took the short boat ride back to my resort to add yet another log to my dive journal while enjoying a relaxing beer by the resort pool. All in all a good day of diving even though it was just the one dive.

The following morning I awoke to bad weather conditions, not big worries this day was scheduled for blending gas and sorting out the logistics for a journey to Prince of Wales the following day. All was well until I received a phone call at 6pm that evening, it was the owner of the store to inform me the dive to Prince of Wales was going to be canceled. I was not pleased and after lengthy discussion it became apparent the dive was not going to take place simply they did not have enough divers to run the trip having previously told me this would not be a problem if I made the journey and decision to dive with them, yet another poor show from my chosen operator. I spent the evening deep in thought about what to do as I just will not get chance to return to dive here anytime soon. The only other option to dive these wrecks was by liveaboard from Singapore and I was truly beginning to regret not choosing that option. After further discussion the following day with the dive store I felt totally pissed off and just wanted to leave immediately I did just that and made my journey back to KL.

I have now had chance to think more clearly about the trip and in a more relaxed frame of mind and remember the best part of the trip a great dive on HMS Repulse

I am now planning a further trip to these wrecks this time via liveaboard hopefully this time it will run a little smoother and I will finally get a chance to dive the wreck of HMS Prince Of Wales.