

THE BOMBER REEF DVD

Seawest Productions,
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Australia.
£15.00 including postage.

SEAWEST MAY not be a familiar name to Scottish divers but it is the name of the production company founded and run by Scotsac Honorary vice-chairman Walt Deas. Walt has been producing videos and writing books for many years and we have reviewed many of them in **SCOTTISH DIVER**. Walt has also written many excellent articles for the magazine and continues to support the club and magazine wherever and whenever he can. That said it is still possible to review his work objectively because I watched it with a friend who also makes videos albeit at a more amateur level.

Walt has spent years researching this project both in Papua New Guinea, Australia and America. 'The Bomber Reef' tells the story of a North American B-25 Mitchell Bomber and her crew.

Walt starts the story by giving the background to why the aircraft was there in the first place. During the Second World War the Japanese invaded New Guinea leaving just the Torres Straight between them and Australia. The Australians pushed them back and set up a base in Port Moresby. The squadron of B-25's including the plane at the centre of this film operated from this base.

They were very successful, in fact this airplane was the third most successful with a remarkable tally of ships and aircraft sunk or shot down. However on this fatal mission it was hit by ground fire and was forced to crash land in the sea just off an island close to Madang. Five of the surviving crew swam ashore and were captured by the Japanese.

The fate of the bomber's crew is told thoroughly and with great compassion. The last part of the film covers how the wreck was found and identified and what it has become today, an artificial reef adding to the diversity and wealth of marine life in the area.

This is a great story, well told with lots of contemporary black and white footage of B-25 bombers and lots of detail about the war in the Pacific and the part played by the aircraft and crew. Throughout the film there are interviews with some of the surviving airmen and their descendants, including a moving

piece where the son of one of the crew dives to the wreck and looks at where his father sat at the controls of the plane. This brings a more human aspect to the story and adds an emotional element that lifts the story from just a film about a colourful wreck.

I have two minor criticisms, I think at 50 odd minutes it is a touch too long, even cutting five minutes off would help. Secondly there are some not so special, special effects which I don't think add anything to the film, however there aren't many and they did not really detract from my overall enjoyment of the film.

Walt is a very experienced film maker and with the 'Bomber Reef' he has found a story well worth telling. He is also a passionate environmentalist and promoter of conservation and the film makes the point that what once was a machine designed to destroy and kill, has become a haven for marine life. He spends some time telling us about the different species of coral, fish and invertebrates that have colonised the B-25.

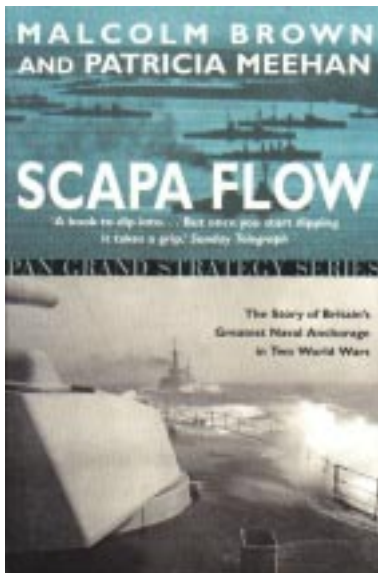
Throughout the film there are shots of tanks, artillery and many aircraft left in the jungle now overgrown and becoming part of the landscape. Walt makes the point that nature, by reclaiming and colonising wrecks like this B-25, provides a fitting testament to the sacrifice made by the men who fought to give future generations the freedom to explore the world above and below the water.

Since writing this review the DVD has been awarded a certificate of merit at the prestigious Chicago Film Festival. Well done Walt.

Jack Morrison

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SCAPA FLOW
Malcolm Brown & Patricia Meehan
ISBN – 1405007850
(Paperback)
Price £7.99

OVER THE years I have read many books on the history and diving of Scapa Flow. When I

was asked to review this one, I thought that it would just be a rehash of some of the excellent historical accounts of what happened during both world wars, however I soon realised that although this book covered the same time in history it looked at history as it developed through the eyes of those that lived it.

The accounts of the journey from London to Orkney and the conditions the servicemen had to cope with in the First World War are very grim.

Also mentioned is the waiting and the boredom of war, restrictive access to the 'night life' of Kirkwall, men so bored they are desperate to go out and fight their invisible enemy, and when they did at Jutland, the horror of what war was along with the tragic waste of life.

The only good thing about the Second World War was the introduction of the fairer

sex, though there was a ratio of around 600 men to each girl.

This book was first published in 1968, but was reissued as part of the 'Pan Grand Strategy Series' by..... well, Pan and with the exception of a new introduction the book remains largely as it was first published, including the original black and white photographs.

Inevitably the book mentions the scuttling of the German grand sea fleet, well no book about Scapa Flow could really miss it out, however there is very little on the main salvage work, as this took place between the wars.

The accounts of before and during the scuttling by those who witnessed it makes for fascinating reading, especially when some of the guards were issued with rifles and no ammunition with orders to shoot any German who came ashore and offered any resistance. These guards were placed under arrest and suffered 14 days punishment for disobeying orders.

The tragedy of Scapa is also covered at great length with the loss of the *HMS Vanguard*, *HMS Hampshire*, *HMS Royal Oak*, *HMS Narborough* and *HMS Opal*, with harrowing accounts from those unfortunate enough to witness the events or in some cases those fortunate to survive.

One young midshipman was very fortunate to survive the explosion that devastated *HMS Vanguard* in July 1917, he then went on to become the commander of *HMS Royal Oak* and was equally fortunate to survive the loss of his ship to U-47.

This is an excellent book if the life of people interests you, a kind of early to mid 20th century 'fly on the wall' documentary. Big Brother can take lessons from this of real people dealing with real events throughout the book. In some bits moving and other bits amusing, it demonstrates the attitudes of people in the dark days of both wars, though I have to say, they can keep it.

Kevin Watson



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