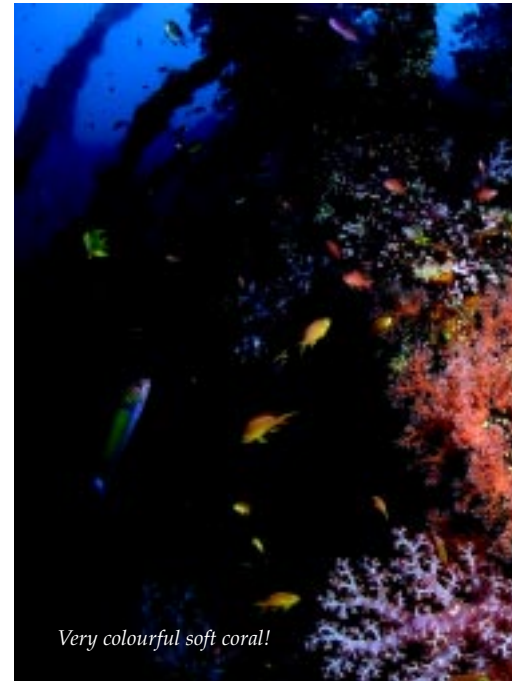




The super structure is covered in colourful soft coral



Very colourful soft coral!

One Wreck Of A Dive

Lawson Wood returns to the pages of
SCOTTISH DIVER in style with a dazzling
story and photos to match. Lawson was
impressed by the *Liberty Glo* experience
in Bali and we're sure you will be too ...



Access to the wreck was via the shore

WELL, OF ALL the places in the world, I didn't think that I would ever dive on a shipwreck like this. The *USAT Liberty Glo*, (formerly the *SS Scooba* – no kidding!), in my humble opinion is quite probably one of the best, if not the best wreck dive from the shore I have found anywhere, and I have been to a lot of locations around this little world of ours to qualify this statement.

So, where is it; what is it and what makes it so special? Located at Tulamben Beach in northeast Bali the *Liberty Glo* is flagged up as Bali's most famous dive, most reports say that if you are visiting Bali and considering diving, then this is the number one place to be. I had mixed feelings about this statement as this conjures up all sorts of unnecessary hype and hundreds of divers, maybe it will be like Stoney Cove on a Saturday morning, what do I know?

We left Lotus Bungalows at Candi Dasa on the east coast of Bali with Gangga Divers and drove over the north eastern mountain range amidst absolutely spectacular scenery just a short one hour's journey to Tulamben Beach. We arrived early, around 8.30am, and were met by a posse of porters from the local village who carry all of your diving equipment down the 100 metres from the car park to the narrow beach. For only \$1.00 per load, this seems ridiculously low, but the money helps the villagers incredibly. Considering that there must be hundreds, if not thousands of divers who visit this site every month, then it all soon adds up! These porters are mainly female and they will stack two full sets of kit on their heads. Yep - two tanks, BCs and regs, loop your weight belts over their shoulders and carry your bag at the same time in the other hand!

As we checked our gear and got the cameras ready, Jan Bebe the manager of



Diver under the hull

Gangga Divers told us the story of the wreck we were about to visit. The *USAT (United States Army Transport) Liberty Glo* was built at the Hog Island Emergency Shipyard in Philadelphia but was not taken into service until after the November 1918 armistice. She was laid down as the *SS Scooba* on June 1918 and was originally 120m (394ft) long, with a 16m (54ft) beam and weighed 6211 tons.

By the time she was launched on June 14, 1919, her name had changed to the *SS Liberty Glo* and she was delivered to the US Shipping Board on August 2, 1919. The *Liberty Glo* was the 36th Hog Islander and one of 12 built as 'Type B' troop carriers. Often misnamed the *USS Liberty*, this armed cargo ship was not a 'Liberty Ship' as she is also often referred to (which was a similar concept of vessel built during WWII), rather she was a regular cargo ship converted for armed protection with guns fore and aft.

The *SS Liberty Glo* actually struck a mine and split in two off the Dutch coast in 1919. Her captain managed to put her ashore, saving all of the crew's lives and her cargo. Captain Stousland paid the following tribute to the Hog Island product:

"She broke close to the rivets but they remained intact, notwithstanding the fact that the number three bulkhead is now the bows and against it the breakers hammered without mercy to my great

surprise it remained intact. The *Liberty Glo* was built as good as any ship afloat and how she hung together after being cut in two was most remarkable."

She served as a supply ship during World War II until she was torpedoed by the Japanese Submarine I-166 at 4.15am on January 11, 1942 whilst crossing the Lombok Straits. Carrying a cargo of railway parts and rubber between Australia and the Philippines for the war effort, the ship was rescued and taken in tow towards Singaraja on Bali by the Dutch destroyer *HNLMS Van Ghent* and the US destroyer *USS Paul Jones (DD-230)*. Sadly the damage was so great that the crew had to be evacuated from the ship and she was beached on the shore at Tulamben over 70km from the nearest safe harbour. One of 58 Hog Islanders that were casualties during WWII, the ship was emptied of her cargo and over the years the local villagers basically stripped her down.

The ship languished against the shore for over 21 years until the massive and fatal eruption of the Gunung Agung volcano in 1963. At 3142 metres high, Gunung Agung is the largest active volcano on Bali and when she erupted, 1148 people were killed by pyroclastic flows, lava bombs and ash falls, a further 305 were severely injured. Between February 18 and March 17, over 50 million cubic metres of material were

expelled and deposited on the surrounding countryside and ash fell to around 75cm deep.

Underneath this onslaught of rock and ash combined with massive earth tremors, the *Liberty* was pushed over the wall and quickly broke her back. The ash and expelled boulders pushed her stern around to the east, leaving the ship lying parallel to the shore. She keeled over into the depths and the ash piled up against her port side. Now the ship lies only 50 metres directly out from the beach and has diving depths ranging from 5m to 32m.

We quickly kitted up and entered the surf line and soon made our way over the black sand and ash slope. This slope is home to garden eels; mimic octopus; anemones and their attendant clownfish, mantis shrimps and so much more. Suddenly the beach slope stopped and we gazed over the port side of the ship to the awesome site of an entire shipwreck, opened up and sloping gently into the depths. Tangled wreckage; and huge swim-throughs were all covered in beautiful soft corals, gorgonian sea fans, bouquets of brilliant blue and pink tunicates and tons of tropical fish. The stark change from drab ash grey and brown to this brilliant spectacle was startling to say the least!

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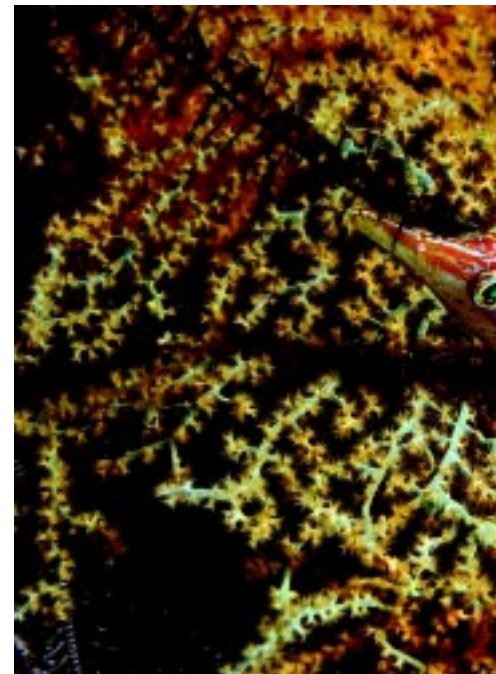
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macro subjects abound on the wreck



tiny coleman's shrimps living on fire urchin



There were huge numbers of anemones and clownfish, but these anemones also had cleaner shrimps, crabs and sometimes two or three different species of anemonefish all inhabiting the same space. Our dive guide Nikko took us down the slope to the stern where her guns rested and along the starboard side of the wreck to around midway along the superstructure. At 22 and 26 metres he showed us two different species of pygmy seahorse.

Ascending into the open aspects of the wreck there were Moorish idols; angelfish; butterflyfish; tons of crinoids and feather starfish all with commensal shrimps and tiny squat lobsters. The sea fans had Longnose hawkfish and the hard corals had leaf scorpionfish, frogfish, stonefish, gobies and blennies. There were schools of batfish, sweetlips, fusiliers, clouds of anthias to rival any

Red Sea scene and colourful nudibranchs and flatworms could be found in all areas and there were cleaning stations everywhere with fish of all shapes and sizes queuing up to be cleaned by tiny wrasse and various shrimps.

To cap it all there was a massive shoal of Bigeye trevally (*Caranx sexfasciatus*) just to the seaward side of the wreck forming endless lazy spirals in the water column, totally unperturbed by our presence, then a school of bumphead parrotfish swam by! After an hour in the water we did our safety stop rummaging along the dark sand and boulder shoreline discovering tiny iridescent blue damselfish; jawfish; fire urchins with the amazing Coleman's shrimps living amidst the stinging spines and even the exotic harlequin shrimp. Absolutely incredible: over 400 species of fish and 200 species of nudibranch have been

recorded on the shipwreck and beach!

We waited impatiently on the shore, having a light snack, for the obligatory hour to pass before we could do it all over again! By this time the beach was getting busier and the porters carried a steady stream of eager divers' equipment to and from the beach. We were there for the day and had staked our claim.

I am constantly surprised at how a well dived location keeps looking so good and hundreds of divers visit this wreck weekly, in fact this wreck earns more money for the local economy than all the other dive sites put together. Observing the divers around us, there is minimal impact as most divers keep fairly well away from the corals and hydroids and the wreck itself is so open in aspect that there is nowhere for trapped air bubbles to kill the marine life. The coastline is swept by only a light current, but this current is very nutrient rich and feeds the



absurd looking frogfish



a lone barracuda patrols the wreck



long-nosed hawkfish on seafan

fishes, corals and other invertebrates constantly. There is no commercial fishing in the area; no rivers nearby and no heavy commercial activity, other than from shore diving. All in all, this is as near perfect a dive site as you can find – anywhere.

The *USAT Liberty Glo* is undoubtedly one of the best wreck shore dives I have ever been on and it is suited to all levels of diver experience. This is the jewel in Bali's crown, but Bali as a diving destination more than excelled any reputation and overall there is as much of a diversity of dive sites and marine life here than anywhere else in the region. Photographically I actually preferred Bali to many other island locations as there is an incredibly high yield in return for little effort. Plus, of course, the island of Bali is as beautiful as the peoples who inhabit it.

FACTFILE

How To get There

You can fly direct to Ngurah Raj International Airport in Denpasar, the capital of Bali with Singapore Airlines and Garuda Airlines. It is always worth staying over in Singapore on the way there or on the return for those heady duty-free delights. We stayed at the Albert Court Hotel as it is adjacent to Sim Lim Square in Little India where so many people go to get their underwater cameras, housings, lenses and computer bits.

Air and Water

The air temperature averages between 25-30°C and the water temperature is usually between 26-28°C. However it does drop down as low as 16-18°C during August and September, be warned! Full diving suits are always recommended, including hoods in tropical waters due to invisible stinging things in the water column and many of the reefs and wrecks are covered in stinging hydroids. The shore entry can be a little tricky as there are usually small waves present which tumble over the fist-sized boulders for the first few metres.

Power

All electrical outlets are 220/240v with European round pin or British square pin plugs, perfect for recharging batteries. 110v transformers are also available in all bathrooms.

Where to Stay and Who to Dive With

Lotus Bungalows, Candi-Dasa, Bali. This bungalow style hotel is a dedicated diving resort but with full spa facilities and superb restaurant with a traditional brick pizza oven. The rooms are perfect with plenty of power points and all facilities, including a sea view nearby their infinity swimming pool. Their in-house diving operation is Gangga Divers, quite possibly one of the best diving companies we have ever

been helped by. Their dedicated dive boat, with toilet on board is kept spotlessly clean. The staff are incredibly knowledgeable and as dive guides, (read critter finders), they are fantastic, making life for this photographer so much easier. Two further aspects made them stand out for us. Firstly our equipment was washed and cared for each day, plus a warm soapy water wash on the last day to keep everything nice and clean before travelling. Secondly, each dive is logged meticulously, entered into their computer and a print out is provided of all your dives with depths, times and location, plus a map of all the dive sites visited. This was a particularly nice souvenir of our diving in Bali with Gangga Divers.

Which Dive Travel Company?

Snooba Travel is able to organise all aspects of the journey to Indonesia and are agents for Lotus Bungalows and Gangga Divers. www.snooba.com Tel: 0870 162 0767

Lawson and Lesley Wood travelled courtesy of Singapore Airlines, Silk Air and Garuda Airlines. They stayed at Lotus Bungalows on Gili Trawangan; Bali and Gangga Island and dived with Gangga Divers as well as Kungkung Bay Resort in the Lembah Straits.



Paradise accommodation in Lotus Bungalows