

Sri Lanka 2005—the search for HMAS *Vampire* (1942) and the VOC ship *Dolfijn* (1663)

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Introduction

As part of the second of the *Shipwreck Detectives* documentary series, produced by Prospero Productions, two episodes in Sri Lanka were identified as potential programmes. The first project was centred around an attempt to locate HMAS *Vampire*, the escort destroyer that was sunk together with the aircraft carrier HMS *Hermes* by the Japanese in 1942. The second programme outlined the work in Galle, on the Dutch VOC shipwreck sites, particularly the work of the Netherlands Government funded operation which the Western Australian Museum instigated in 1992. As part of a segment of that programme, a search for the Vereengide Oostindische Compagnie (VOC or Dutch United East India Company) ship *Dolfijn* (1663).

The loss of HMAS *Vampire*

In February 1942, HMAS *Vampire* and the HMS *Hermes* were stationed in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). *Vampire* was involved in escort duties and screening the aircraft carrier *Hermes*. At the beginning of April 1942 the overwhelming success of Japanese operations on land and sea made it clear that Ceylon was untenable as a base for operations. On 28 March 1942 the Allies received a warning of a pending air attack on Ceylon on or about 1st April. It was decided

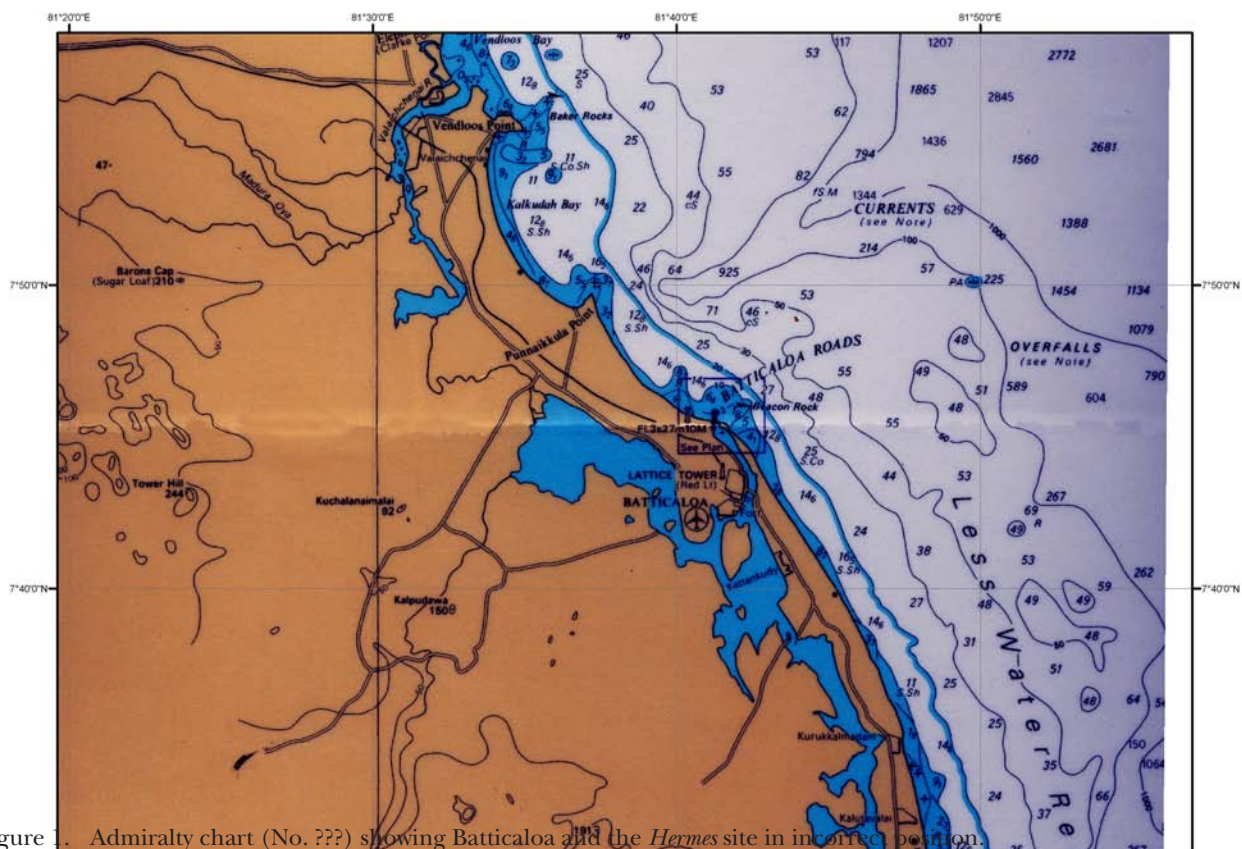


Figure 1. Admiralty chart (No. ???) showing Batticaloa and the *Hermes* site in incorrect position.

to concentrate the Fleet which comprised five battleships; three aircraft carriers including the *Hermes*; six cruisers and fourteen destroyers including *Vampire* in a position from which an air attack could be launched against the Japanese. The Fleet operated south of Ceylon for about 3 days without any contact. On 2nd April with the old 'R' Class battleships running short of water the Fleet sailed for the British operational base at Addu Atoll in the Maldives. The cruisers *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall* were detached to Colombo and *Hermes*, escorted by *Vampire*, to Trincomalee, where the latter two ships were to prepare for 'Operation IronClad' against the Vichy occupied Diego Suarez in Madagascar. Meanwhile, a Japanese fleet had sailed from the Celebes on 26 March to attack Ceylon. Under the leadership of Vice Admiral Nagumo the fleet was charged with sweeping the area clear of Royal Navy units and protecting Japanese supply routes. The fleet comprised five fast carriers; four battleships; supported by two heavy cruisers; one light cruiser; eleven destroyers, the entire group being fuelled at sea by six fleet tankers. In the late afternoon of the 4 April, a patrolling Catalina flying boat sighted the fleet. The allied Fleet put to sea but too late to intercept the Japanese, who attacked Ceylon on the 5 April. In Colombo the harbour was cleared of shipping and the *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall* ordered to sea. Both were intercepted by Japanese aircraft, attacked and sunk in less than fifteen minutes. *Hermes* and *Vampire* were ordered to clear Trincomalee before an expected follow up attack on the port. The ships sailed on the night of 8 April and proceeded southward. Next morning



Figure 2. Screen grab from the film *The Most Dangerous Moment* showing *Hermes* and *Vampire* steaming south along coast.

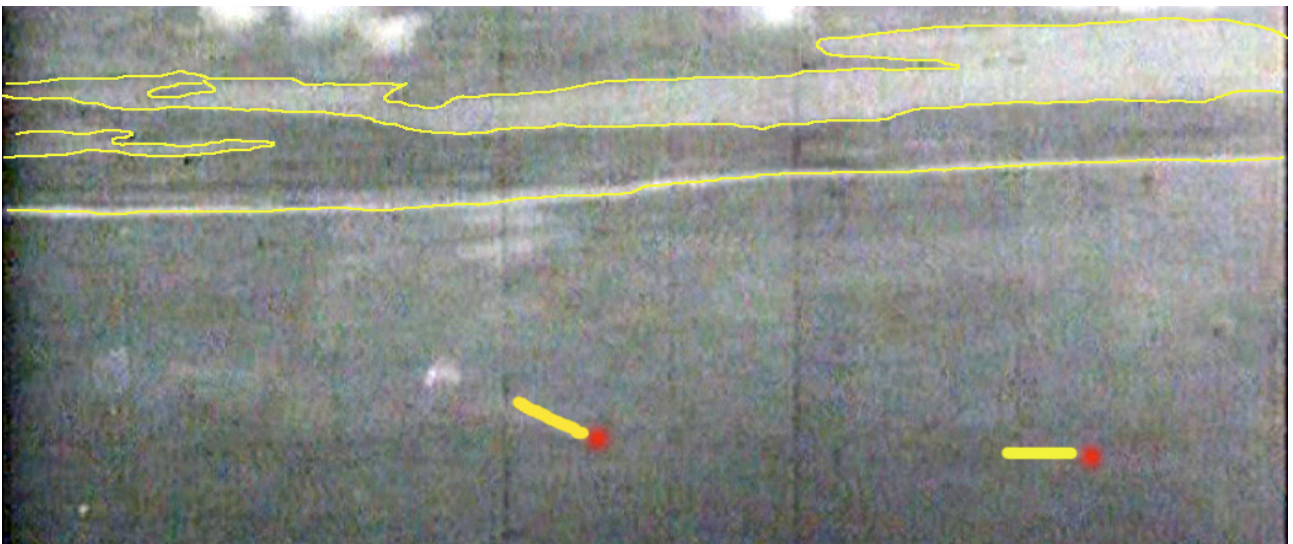


Figure 3. Screen grab from the film *The Most Dangerous Moment* showing *Hermes* and *Vampire* steaming in a roughly north-easterly direction. Note hills and lagoons in background.

54 bombers from the Japanese carriers inflicted severe damage on the Trincomalee dockyard and airfields. The raid ended, *Hermes* and *Vampire* set course to return to Trincomalee. At 10.35 AM off Batticaloa Japanese aircraft sighted and then attacked the *Hermes* and twenty minutes later she sank. The dive bombers then attacked the *Vampire* which broke in half and sank in less than ten minutes. Nineteen officers and 288 ratings of *Hermes* and the Commanding Officer and 8 ratings of *Vampire* were lost or died of wounds. Some 600 were rescued by the hospital ship *Vita*, which observed the engagement on the horizon, others were picked up by local craft and a few swam ashore.

Initial planning considerations for the search

The position of the *Hermes* was known from the Admiralty chart and the *West Coast of India Pilot* and this was considered a starting point for the planning of the survey work. The available information before the start of the survey was as follows:

1. The Admiralty chart shows the position of the *Hermes* about 9.5 nautical miles NE of Batticaloa lighthouse, see Figure 1, and the *West Coast of India Pilot* refers to this wreck as ‘...a 11,000 ton aircraft carrier, the position of which in 1966 was noted with numerous fishing boats operating over the site’. The position of the HMS *Hermes* needed to be confirmed in order to plan a search area for HMAS *Vampire*.
2. Film footage from a documentary called *The Most Dangerous Moment* based on the book by Michael Tomlinson, in which shows the Japanese surveillance aircraft during the attack on *Hermes* and *Vampire* Figures 2–5.



Figure 4. Screen grab from the film *The Most Dangerous Moment* showing *Vampire* under attack, note dive bomber in mid-left of picture.



Figure 5. Screen grab from the film *The Most Dangerous Moment* showing final moments of *Vampire*. Note hills and lagoons in background.

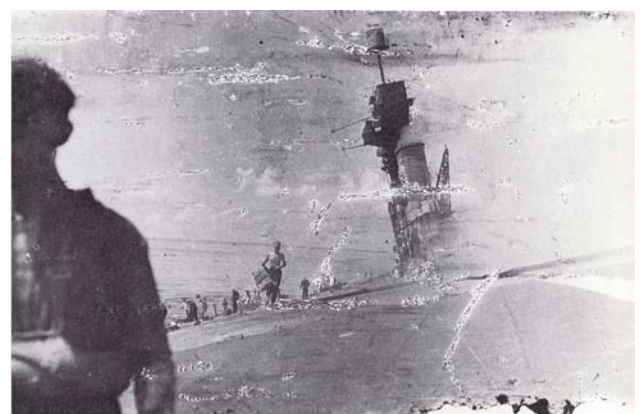


Figure 6. Photographs in *The Hermes Adventure* that were taken by Charles Morgan

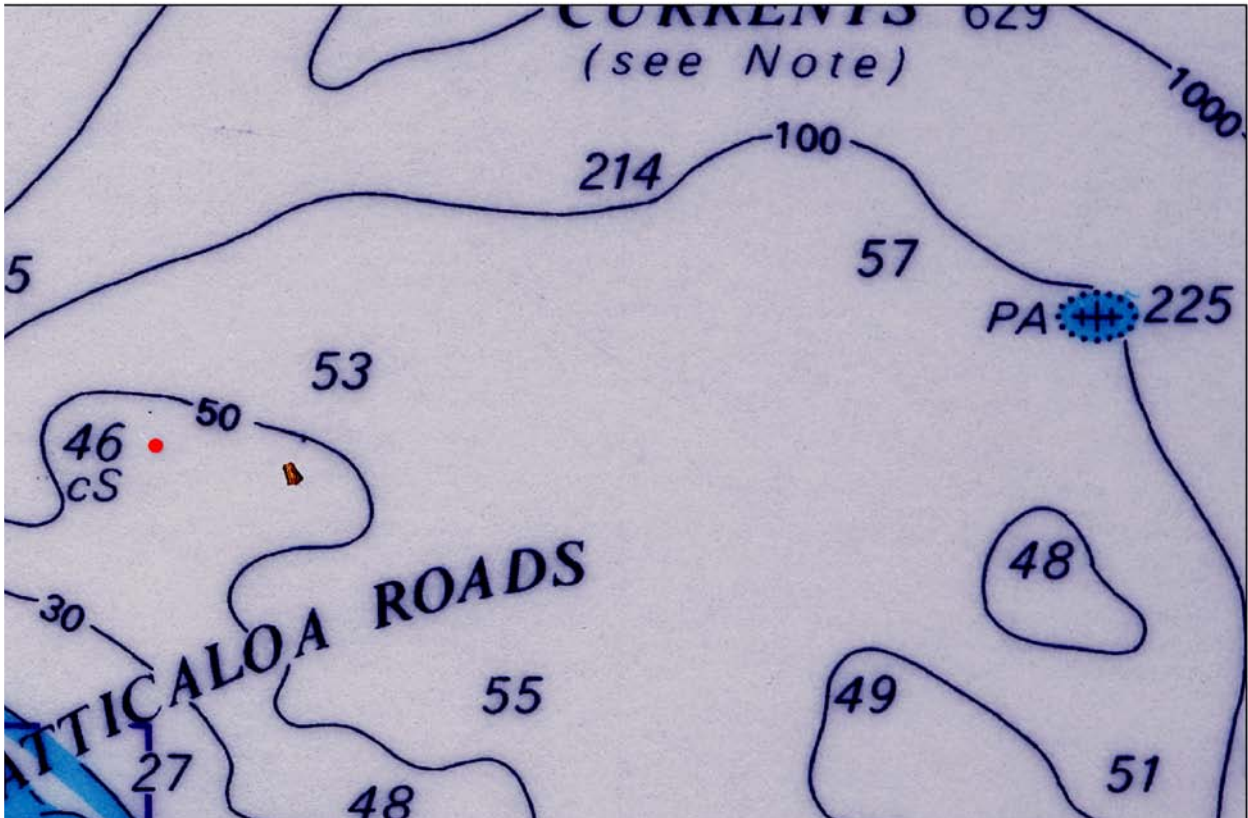


Figure 7. Search area showing deep water trench, false *Hermes* position, Morgan *Hermes* position and true position.



Figure 8. Survey vessel.

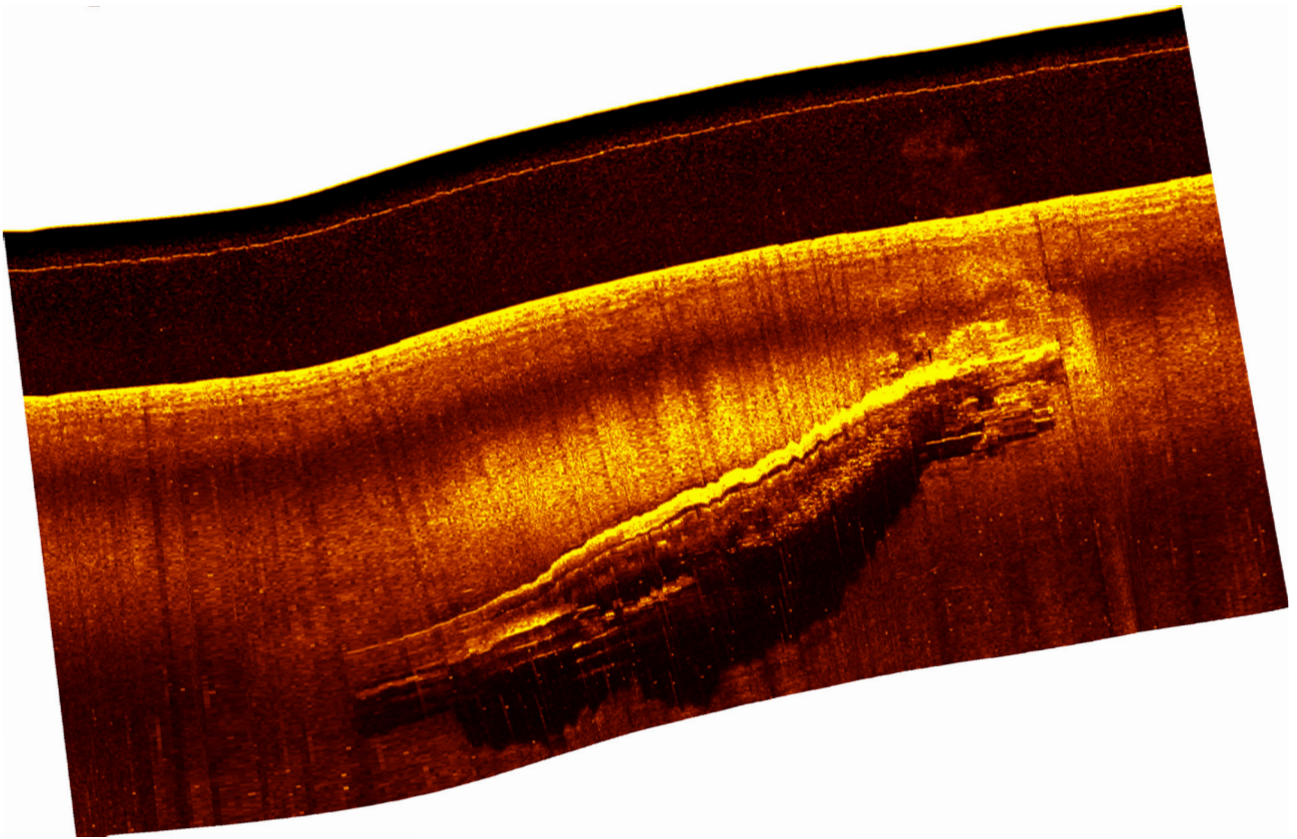


Figure 9. Side scan sonar image of *Hermes*.

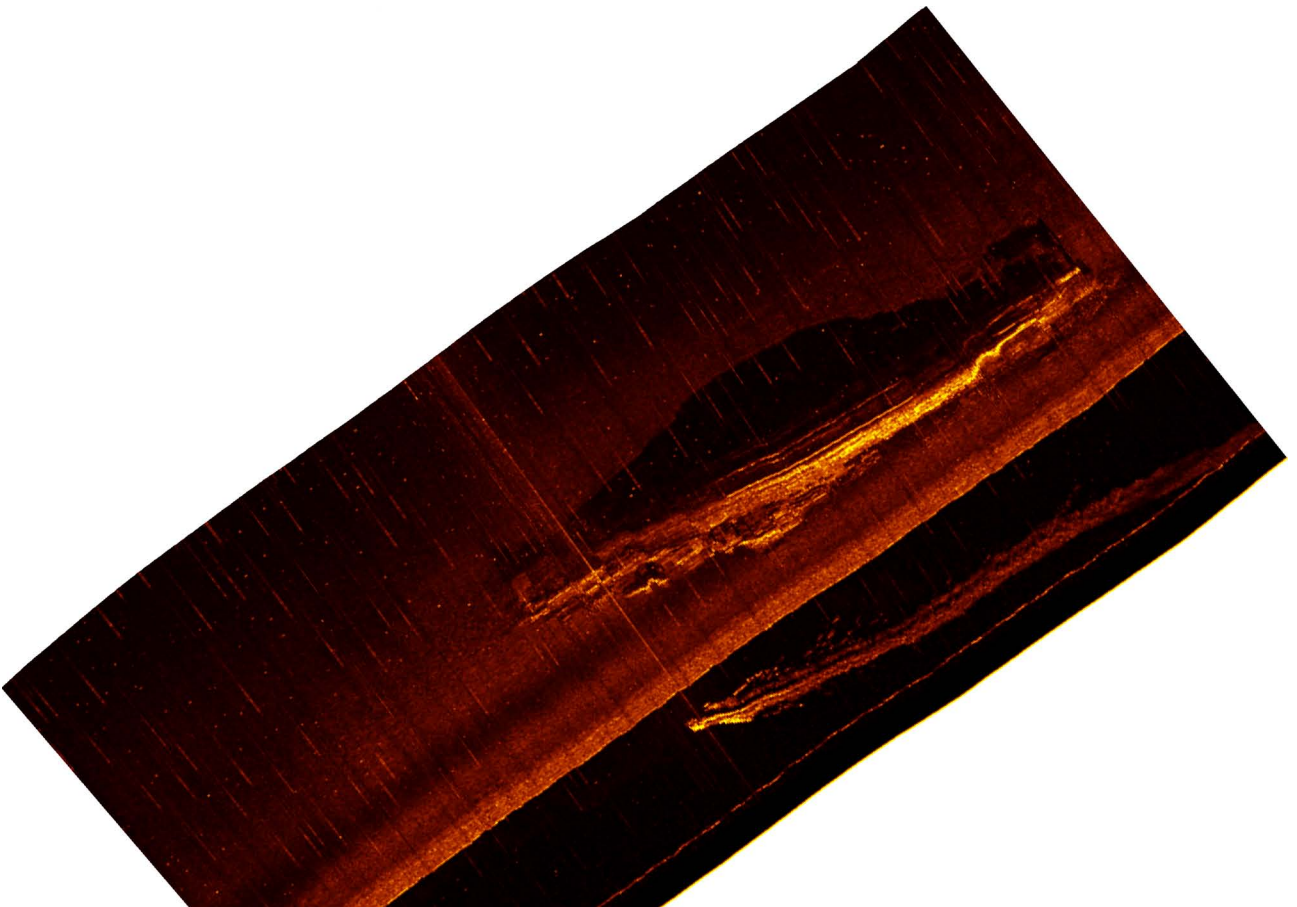


Figure 10. Side scan sonar image of *Hermes*.

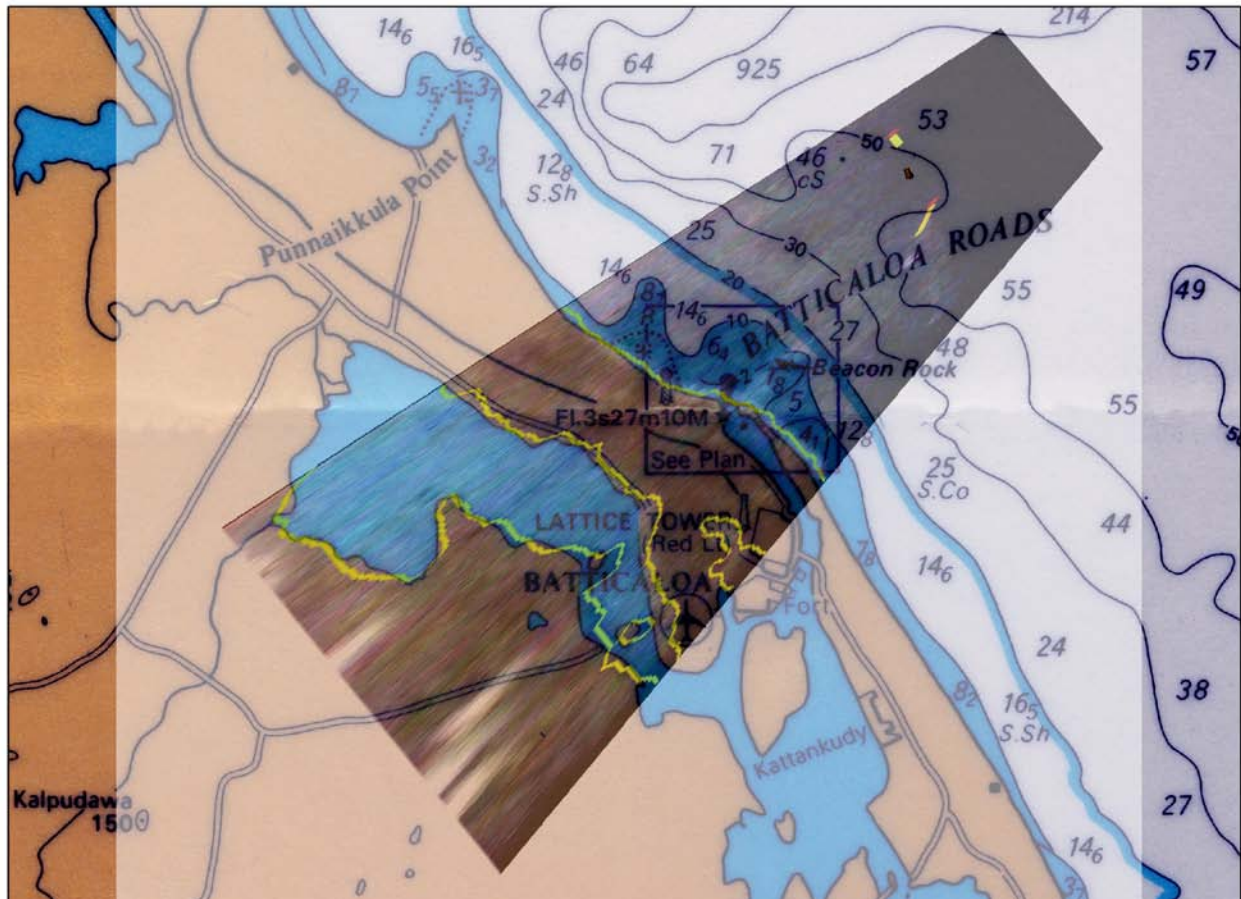


Figure 11. Image from Figure 3 superimposed on the chart of the area after stretching to make features fit the plan.

3. Written and oral accounts of the survivors describing the relative positions of the two vessels during the attack, particularly the accounts in *The Hermes Adventure* by Rex Morgan.
4. Photographs in *The Hermes Adventure* that were taken by Charles Morgan who was an official photographer on board *Hermes* during the attack., Figure 6.

It was also noted that the potential search area had a deep water trench running from the continental shelf to about 4 km from the coast with a depth of about 900 m and that if the *Vampire* was located in this trench, there was no possibility of locating the site with current technology available to us (Fig. 1).

Methodology

The methodology for the search was first to re-locate the *Hermes* and then to conduct a survey to the north of the site. This area was selected based on the written and oral recollections, however, the most compelling evidence was Morgan's photographs. This series of six photographs shows the bow of *Hermes* pointing towards the shore and an almost 180° panorama off the port side of the vessel looking south, with no sign of the *Vampire*, indicating that the vessel was on starboard side of ship to the north.

In May 2005, prior to the fieldwork, Corioli Souter travelled to Sydney to interview survivors from HMAS *Vampire*. The interviewees included Mr Lloyd Saltmarsh (Gunner), Mr Bill Price (Gunner) and Mr Vince Cesari (Stoker). All the survivors recollected that the *Vampire* was close to *Hermes* and in visual range (< 2 nautical miles) when it was sunk. They also corroborated the idea that *Vampire* was north of *Hermes* and heading back towards Trincomalee at the time of the raid. An opportunity during this trip was taken to meet with Mr Rex Morgan to discuss his expedition to find the *Hermes* in 1981. Morgan stated that the *Hermes*, by his reckoning, was 5 nautical miles NE of Batticaloa lighthouse, less than half the distance shown on the chart. Thus at the start of the operation we were aware that the *Hermes* was not in the position reported in the *Pilot* and the hydrographic chart No. ?? As it transpired, when the team was taken to the site by a local fisherman, the position (latitude 7.81487°N, longitude 81.732218°E) was slightly different from Morgan's position, see Figure 7.

The survey was conducted using an ELSEC proton magnetometer and a MarineSonic dual frequency side scan sonar in conjunction with a GPS track plot (Fig. 8). The whole unit was integrated so that the sonar trace and the magnetometer data were recorded on the computer and displayed on the screen. An echo sounder was

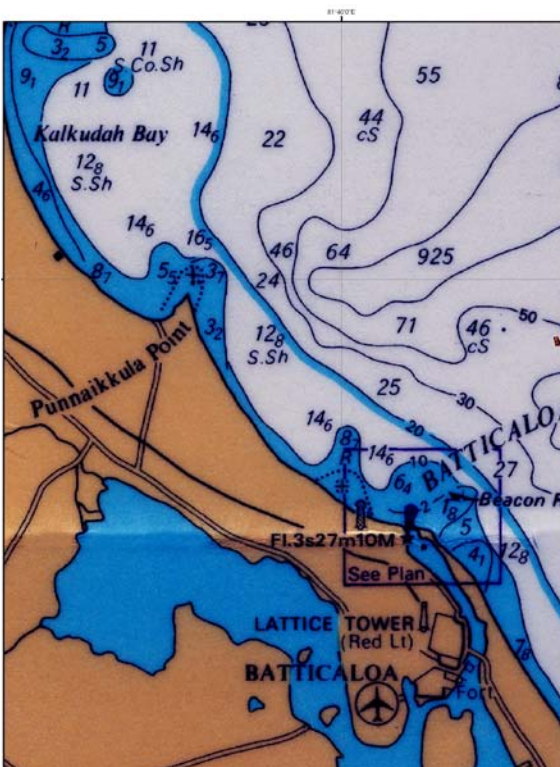


Figure 12. An attempt to make the image from Figure 5 fit chart. Top a coastal outline, middle the clip from the film showing the *Vampire* under attack, not the mountains in the background and the lagoons in foreground. Bottom, plan showing lagoons at Batticaloa.

and the final track is in curving back towards the foreground in the upper part of the 'S' (i.e. heading south). Attempts were made to identify the mountain range in the background, but this proved to be very difficult (Fig. 12). It was thought that the prominent peak that appears in the centre of the photograph, in among the smoke was Friars Hood (654 metres ASL) and that the small bay in the lagoon, slightly left of centre was the headland in the lagoon. Aligning the photograph with the map proved to be very difficult, but it did suggest that, if the mountain was Friars Hood, then the *Vampire* could be located to the north of the deep water trench. This 'northern solution' was investigated and a large area to the north of the trench was surveyed (see Fig. 13). The only substantial anomaly in this region appears to have been derived from a geomagnetic source possibly a magnetic high associated with magnetite.

Results

The northern survey covered all ground in visual range (up to 4 nm) from the *Hermes* site up to the northern border of the deep water trench. The trench, which appears quite abruptly in 50 m of water is indicated on the chart by a 100 m contour (depths changed from 50 m to over 350 m in a distance of about 200 m). Along the east coast of Sri Lanka a plate tectonic subduction zone occurs. The oceanic plate along the coast is subducted into the Indian continental plate resulting in a deep trench running parallel with the eastern seaboard of Sri Lanka, continuing up towards India. The deep water in our search area is part of this submarine complex. The area around this 100 m contour was surveyed in some detail, on both the northern and southern sides. Failing to locate the *Vampire*, the search was expanded to include the area directly around *Hermes*, including south of the wreck. Although archival and oral evidence suggested that the likelihood of finding the ship in this area was low, a survey was also completed to rule the possibility out entirely. No significant anomalies were found. Figure 13 shows area covered by search.

Conclusion

Given the wide area covered in this survey, combined with the photographic and oral evidence, it is highly likely that HMAS *Vampire* is located within the deep water trench. This trench cuts through the most probable location and is also at this point, within a few miles of the shore. This would correspond with the survivors beliefs that they could have swum to shore from the wreck site if the currents had been more favourable. The fact that local fisherman are unaware of any other significant wreck site in the area also supports this theory.

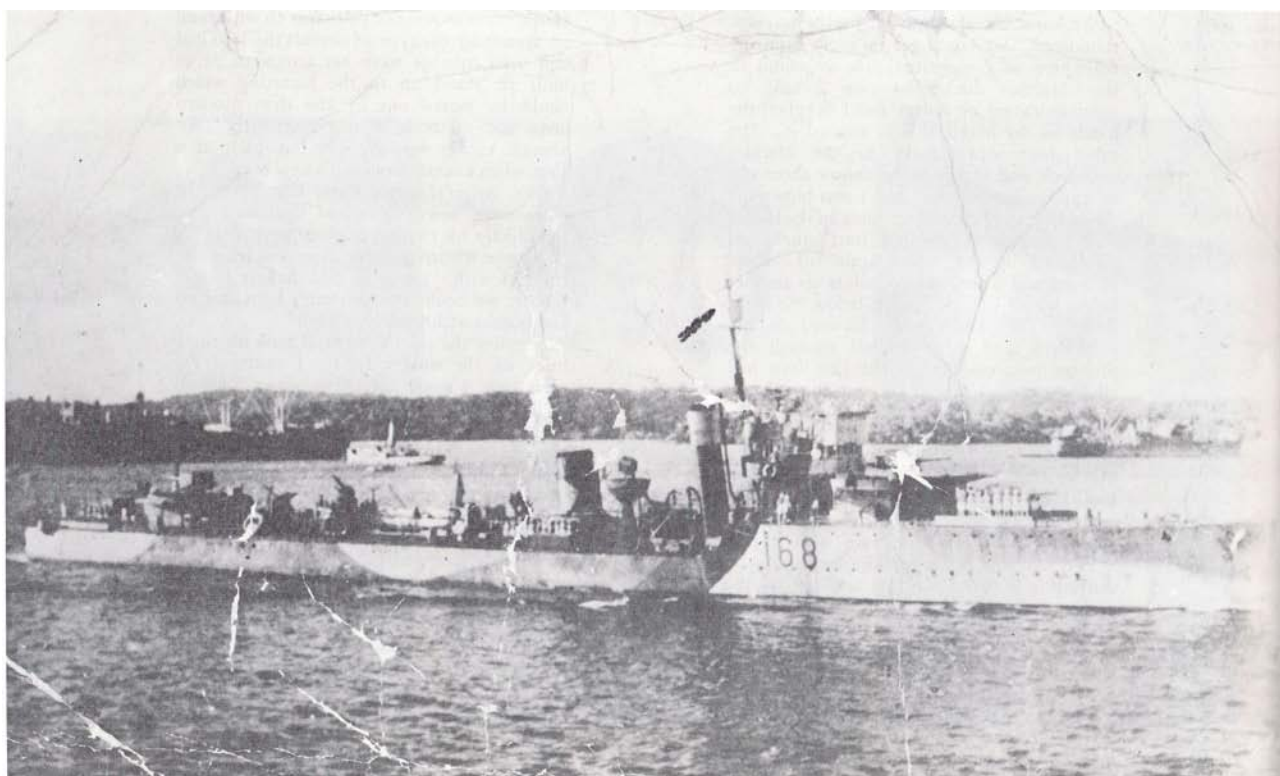


Figure 14. A wartime picture of HMAS *Vampire*.

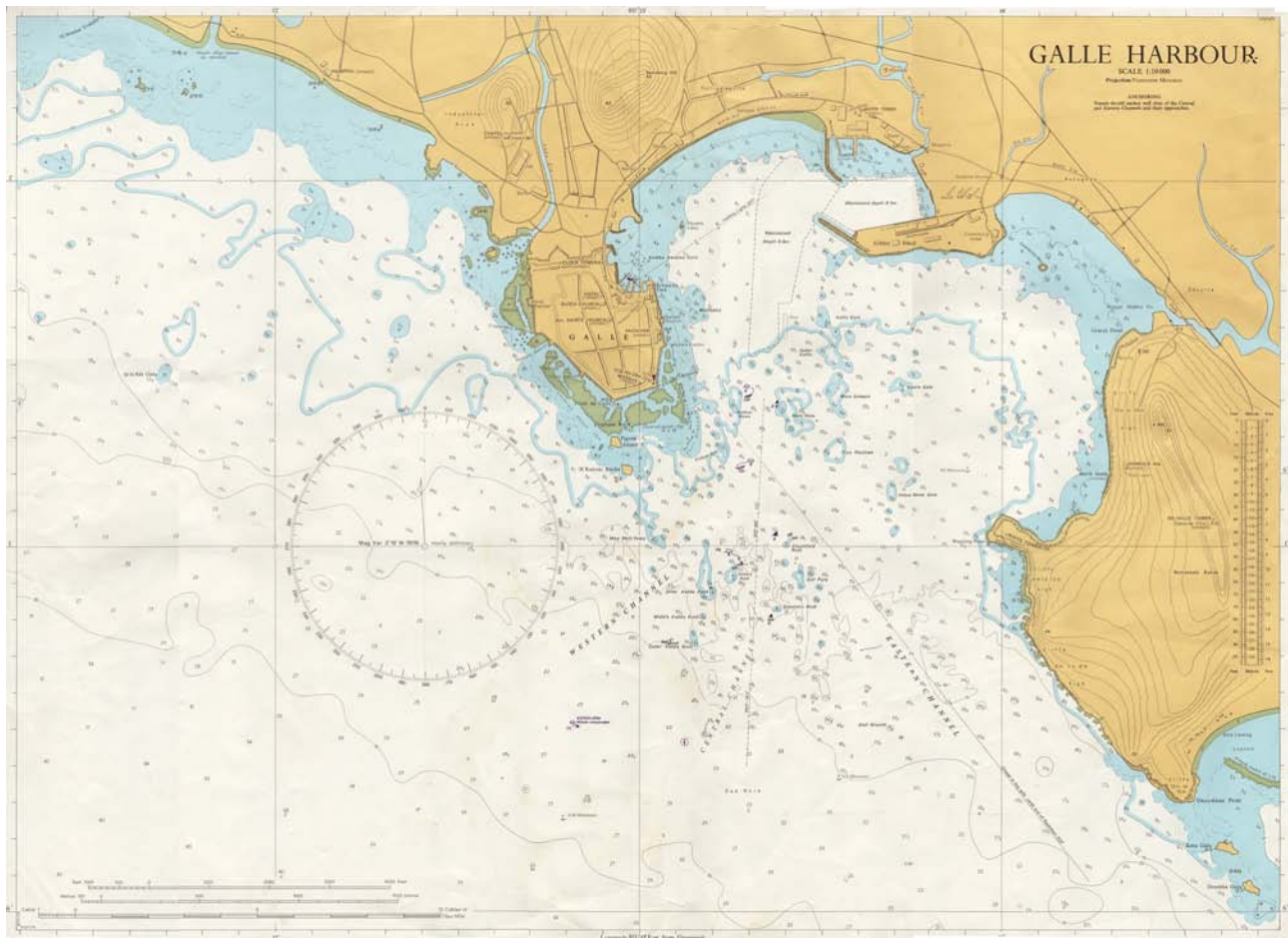


Figure 15. Galle Harbour.

The search for the *Dolfijn*

In 1992 the Department of Maritime Archaeology started a maritime archaeological project in Galle working in conjunction with the Sri Lankan Department of Archaeology. This project then became a joint Sri Lankan, Australian and Netherlands project. Ultimately, when the Australian major basis for funding ceased, the project became a mainly Sri Lanka–Netherlands, project with some support from Australia. In the early stages the project, an analysis of potential Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC or United East India Company) wreck sites in Galle was carried out by the project's Netherlands partner, Robert Parthesius. From archival records of the VOC, he identified the names of the two shipwreck sites the project had discovered in Galle harbour (*Hercules* (1661) and *Avondster* (1659)) and identified three other un-located sites that had been lost in the harbour (*Dolfijn* (1663), *Barbesteyn* (1735), *Geinwens* (1776)). A description of the historical background to these sites was published in Green, Devendra and Parthesius (1998). At the time the project was particularly interested in the *Dolfijn*, as it had the potential to be a well preserved wreck site. Parthesius wrote:

This vessel sailed from Sualijs (Surat) for Batavia on 29 April 1663, after loading packets of yam and letters. Shortly afterwards, the crew found that the ship was leaking badly; even with two pumps they were not able to keep her dry. So they returned to port and examined the ship. After sending the skipper, the high boatswain and the constable's mate below, the leak was found in the powder magazine on the port side. The powder was unloaded and the carpenter was able to repair the leak. On 30 April the *Dolfijn* sailed for the second time. While passing 'het Hoogelant van St. Jan' the ship was strained by heavy seas. Again the crew had to pump day and night to keep her dry. On 3 May the skipper discussed their difficult situation in the 'scheepsraad' (the council of officers). They arrived at a VOC post along the coast of India and asked a merchant there called Zandtvliet for assistance. They asked for twenty to twenty-five locals to pump the vessel in case of emergency. This request was unsuccessful because the locals asked too high a price: one *pagood* (local currency) per month, free water, fire wood and rice, plus a galley, and six months' pay in advance. So the vessel left without assistance but with 32 packets of amphiaen for Coetegin [Cochin]. The *Dolfijn* arrived there on 10 May 'lek maar behouden' (leaking but safe). Once again a request for assistance was turned down. The ship was told to sail on to Galle. It was on this part of the voyage that things went really wrong. On 14 May the ship was at 6° 10' N in bad weather when

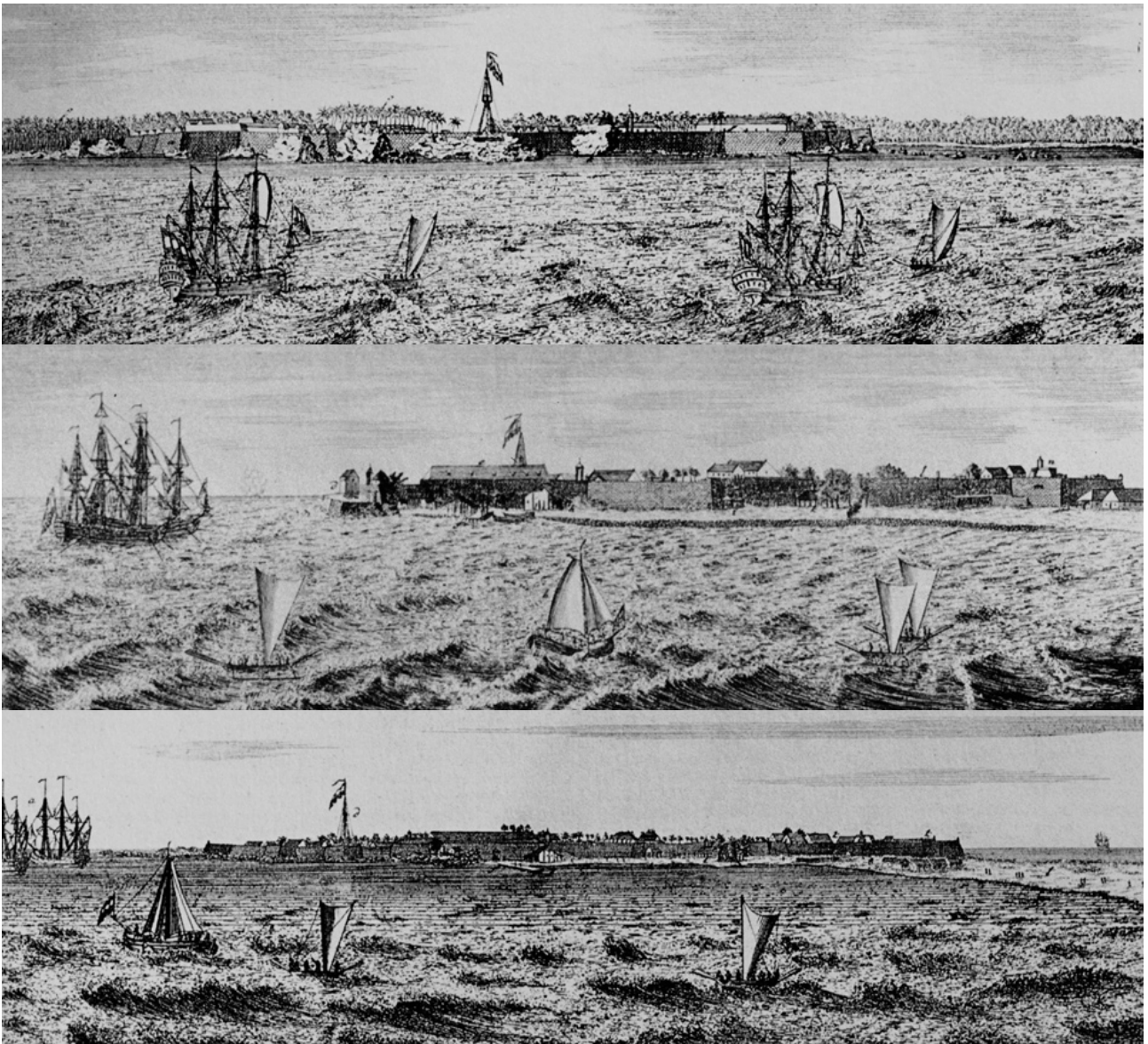


Figure 16. Illustration from *Atlas of Heydt* (1744) showing VOC ships arriving at Galle and being escorted into the harbour. The upper illustration shows the vessels arriving at Galle at the place very close to where the *Dolfijn* is thought to have been lost.

the leak became worse. The skipper decided to anchor in 13 fathoms of water in order not to miss the Bay of Galle. To keep the ship dry, a fourth and a fifth pump had to be installed. The crew was so exhausted after constant pumping that they were not able to lift the anchor. After cutting the anchor rope, the *Dolfijn* sailed along the coast to the Bay of Galle. In the entrance to the bay the ship anchored and fired several guns as distress signals. The situation became untenable, since even five pumps were not enough to keep the ship afloat and buckets were also needed. The only sensible thing to do was to sail the ship into the bay as quickly as possible in order to save the crew, money and cargo. Again the problem was to lift the anchor because the crew were either fully occupied with pumping or were completely exhausted. Another problem arose when the pilot came on board. He explained that it was impossible to enter the bay because the ship was lying directly in front of a shallow reef and the wind was not favourable. Aware of the seriousness of the situation, the VOC sent assistance from the shore, but by the evening the only possibility was to abandon ship since the galleries at the side of the cabin were already striking the water.

An eye-witness account of the disaster was found in the diary of Adriaan van der Meijden who was a high VOC official in Galle at that time (SLNA, Dutch Records: 1/ 2712). 'Shortly after the afternoon a ship came sailing in the direction of the bay. Because it was firing its guns constantly we assumed it was in distress. Originally we thought that it was the *Archilles* sailing from Persia. We gave the pilot Bastiaen the order to go to the ship so far possible because the wind was strong and showery. After several attempts the skipper and former pilot of this

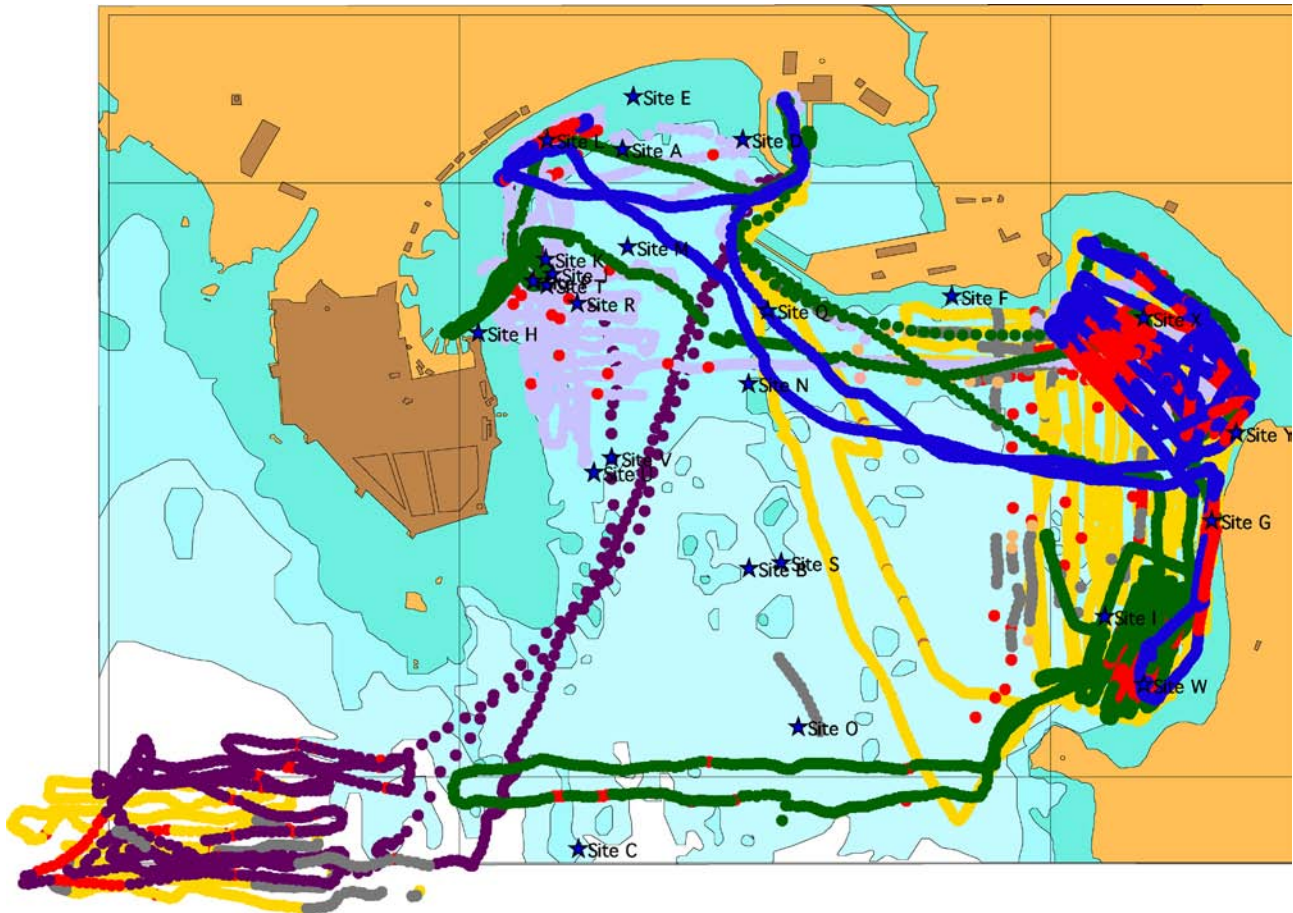


Figure 17. The 1997 survey tracks.

Bay, Daniel Harthouwer, succeeded on getting aboard. Eventually the costly ship the *Dolfijn* was pitiful wrecked in the dark evening [...] The Thonij (pilot vessel) brought the under merchant Meijndert Janssen ashore. He went back on board after handing over the letters from Suratte [...] According to the letters the *Dolfijn* carried a rich cargo. To protect the cargo in expectation of salvage the guards on the *klip bij d' vlaggespil en aen't nieuwe puntje* [...] received the order to stop ships nearing the place of the wreck.

Location of the *Dolfijn*

The archival information suggests that the *Dolfijn* sunk in front of the harbour. This can be interpreted two ways: the ship sank directly in front of Galle—according to the pilot, behind a reef or shallow place; or the ship sank in front of the *valse baai* (false bay) to the west side of the fort (see the Heydt illustrations showing vessels arriving in Galle Figure 16). We also know the ship must lie in depth of about 13–20 m since the day after it sunk only saw the upper part of the masts were above water. Additionally, guards were placed on *puntje van de vlaggemast* (Point de Galle) and *het nieuwe puntje* to prevent people of going to the wreck. It is not clear where *nieuwwe puntje* is, as there are several places in the past that had that name. In the 18th century it was a place near Akersloot bastion at the east-side of the city. From maps and the Generale Missive of the VOC we know that at the end of 1662 construction was taking place on at the east side of the city and called 'Nieuw werck'. This suggests that 'het nieuwe puntje' could be Aeolus bastion (Valentijn, 1726; Wagenaar, 1994: 69) and suggesting that the wreck must be seaward between Point de Galle and Aeolus bastion.

After earlier attempts in 1993 to survey the area SE of the city, side scan sonar and magnetometer surveys were carried out in 1996 and 1997 (Fig. 17). A few sonar targets were found (Fig. 18 and 19), but at the time it was decided to delay the inspection to avoid the danger of looting.

2005 Survey proposal

Since the Department of Maritime Archaeology remote sensing equipment was going to be used in Sri Lanka on the *Vampire* project, it was suggested by Somasiri Devendra that the opportunity should be taken to attempt to locate the *Dolfijn*. A proposal was formulated and forwarded to the Sri Lankan Department of Archaeology for approval.

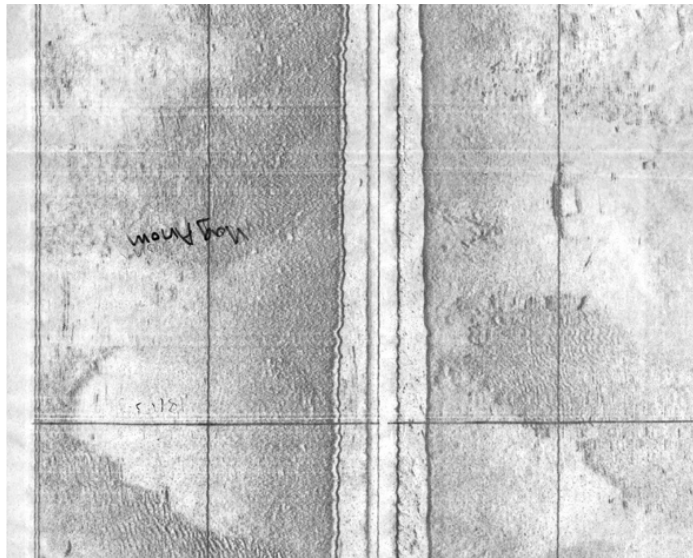


Figure 18. The 1997 sonar traces



Figure 19. The 1997 survey boat.

The proposal

[As part of the *Vampire* project] we will have a sophisticated side scan sonar, magnetometer and fathometer. From the survey in 1997, we know the approximate search area. I propose that we survey a 2 square kilometre area SW of the lighthouse where the *Dolfijn* is thought to have sunk. As we know that the top of the masts were showing, so the depth is known and the search area is quite easy to define. We would complete a full three part survey (side scan, magnetometer and fathometer). This should not take more than two days provided the equipment is working, that there are not strong geo-magnetic anomalies in the area and that the site is visible above the sea bed. We would then do an assessment dive on the site to record what is there, make a preliminary plan of the site and recover any sensitive material. In regard to the latter, we are aware that the conservation facilities of the MAU are already committed to remedial work on the *Avondster* site, so any recovery would be confined to essential items. I would then like, with the help of the Prospero Team, to set up a video surveillance system to monitor the site on a 24 hour basis. I think we can get a quite cheap infra-red video camera that could be mounted on a high building from where the site can be seen and the image shown on a screen somewhere. The ideal situation may be the MAU building, if you can see the site from there. During the non-working hours, the camera could take time lapse images and record them on a VCR. So at night or at the weekend the camera would take a single frame say every half hour. When the team comes back to work, they can flick through 24 images to see if there was anyone diving on the site. This would work at night too. It may alternatively be better to involve the Navy or the

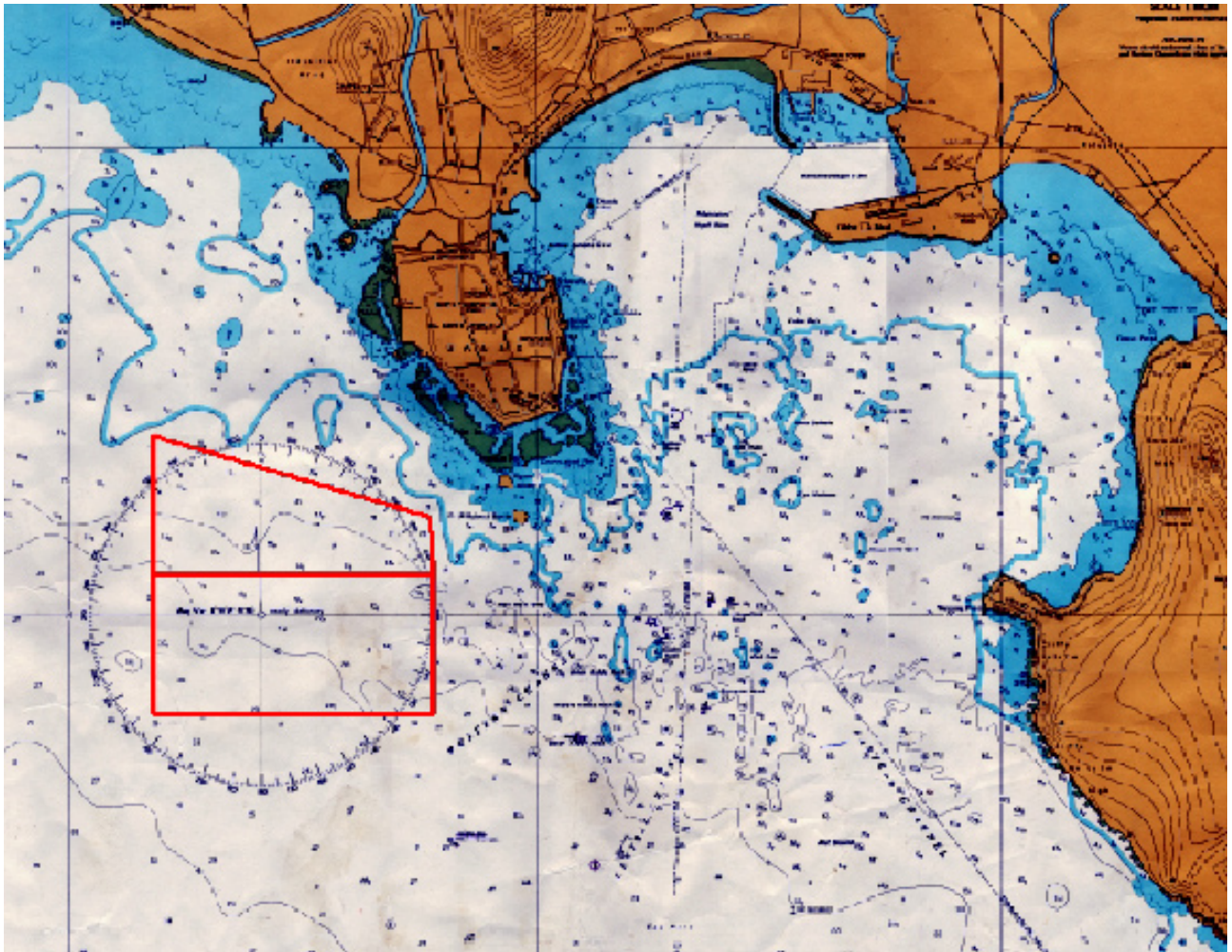


Figure 20. The 2005 proposed search area.

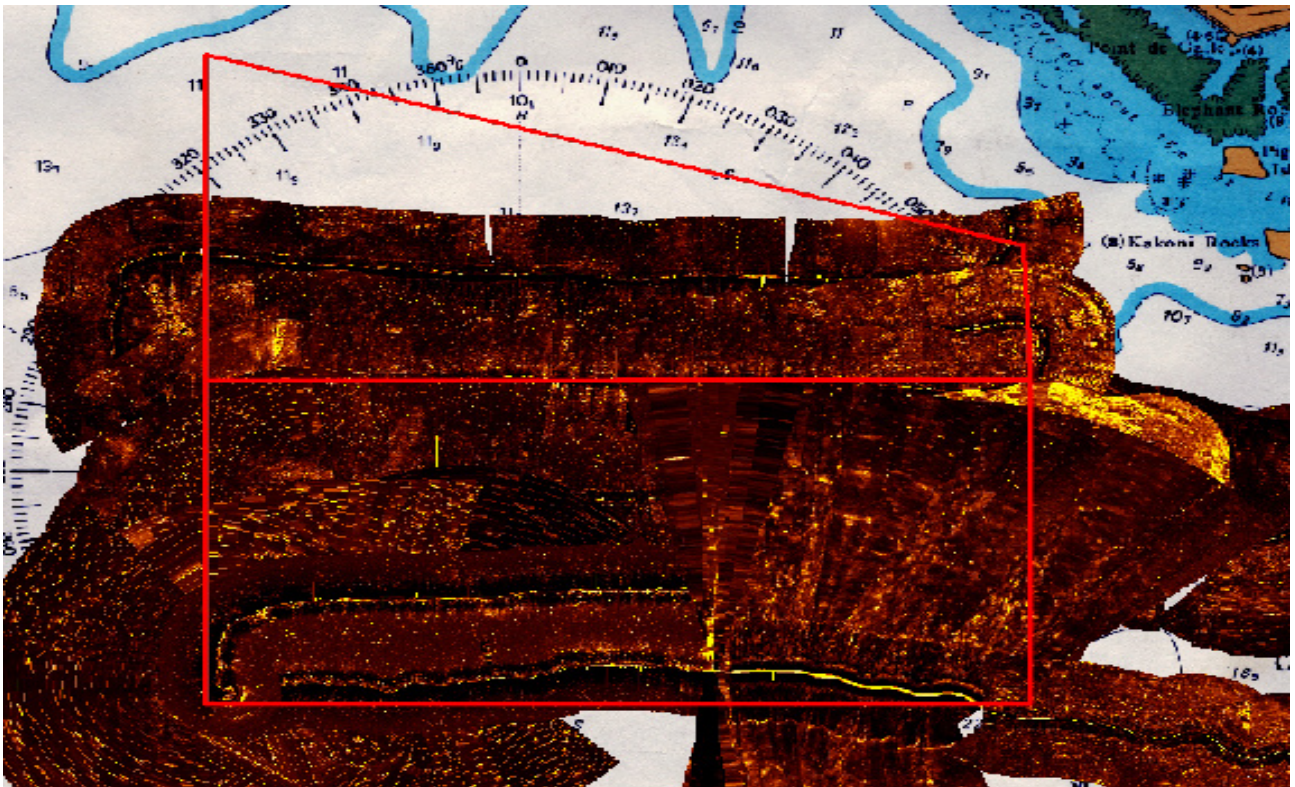


Figure 21. Area surveyed 2005.

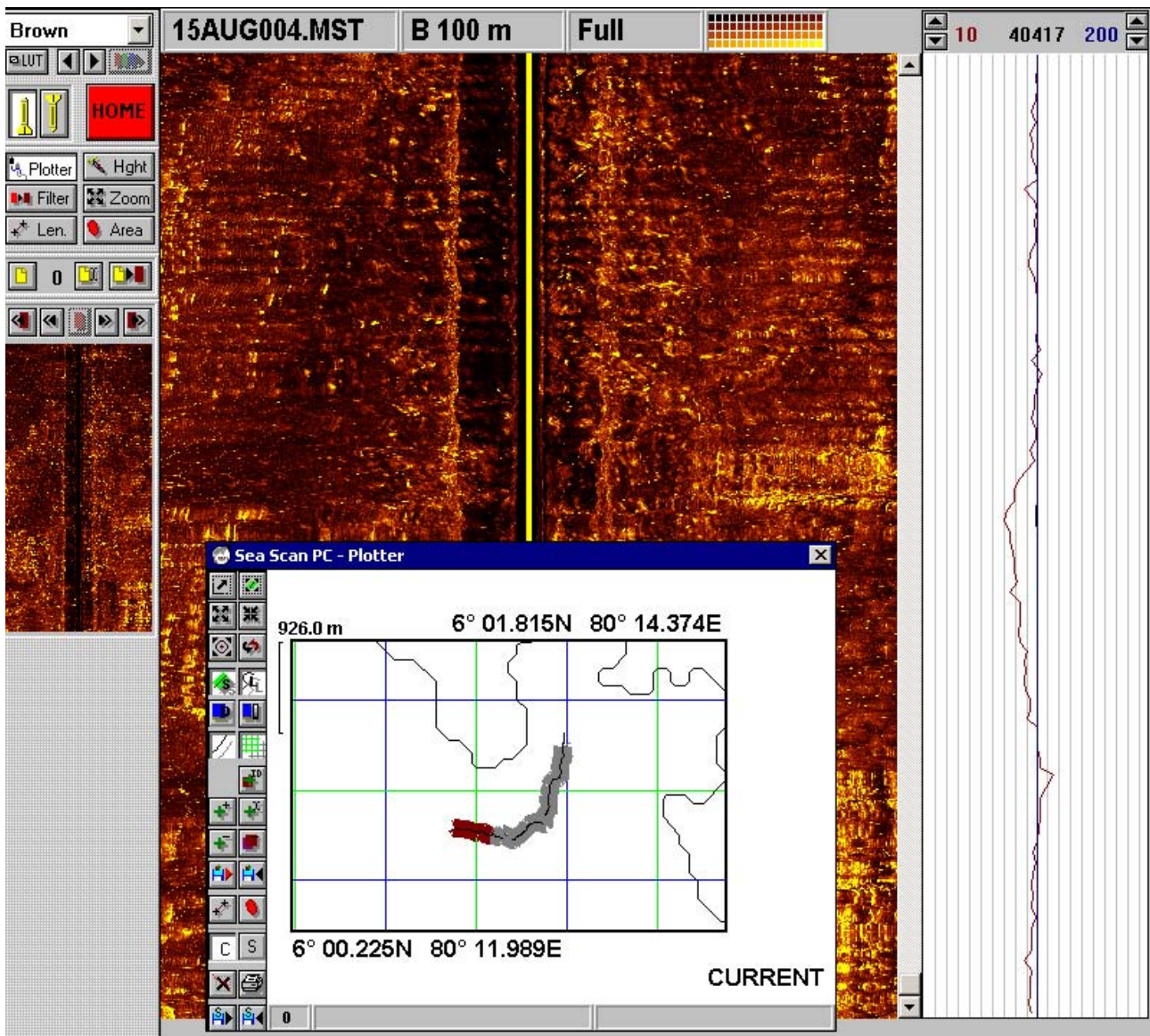


Figure 22. Typical sonar record showing the sonar trace (centre), the magnetometer trace (right) and the navigation screen (centre). Sonar trace shows typical surface noise from sea conditions.

Police in this exercise and you may like to give that some thought. In this way I think one has a real justification for finding the site, because it ensures that the site is afforded the best protection possible.

The survey

As it transpired, our arrival in Galle on 30 July 2005 coincided with the middle of the SW Monsoons (fig. 24). Survey conditions were unsuitable for the side scan sonar because the surface disturbance of wind-borne waves causes interference on the side scan trace (Fig. 22). This is a design fault of this particular dual frequency fish, as the transducers are set vertical, rather than slightly depressed. As a result, the sonar tends to pick up the image of the surface as well as the sea bed. Ideally, the sea state should be absolutely flat calm, so that there is no surface interference, alternatively, the fish can be angled at about 10° from the vertical, and the system run on one channel only so as to avoid the surface interference. The magnetometer was run continuously during the survey, however only very minor anomalies were noted. Assuming that the *Dolfijn* had some salvage work done following its loss, one would expect that the iron cannon and anchors would have been left in place. The fact that both iron cannon and anchors were found on the *Avondster* site in the inner harbour in a few metres of water suggests that these items were not considered worth salvaging. Since the *Dolfijn* was a medium sized vessel, one would probably expect about fourteen iron cannon and probably at least four iron anchors. One would expect to be easily able to detect a group of iron cannon at about 30 m (Green, 2004), so that the indication is that the *Dolfijn* is not in the search area (Figs 20 & 21). However, in view of the difficulties operating the survey vessel in the rough seas, it is possible that the survey could have missed the site. The conditions were really quite unsuitable for a survey to find a historical shipwreck in this sort of area.



Figure 23. The Sri Lankan Navy vessel used for the Galle survey.



Figure 24. View from the survey vessel showing Galle Lighthouse and the Mosque and the typical sea conditions off Point de Galle.

Appendix 1. HMAS *Vampire* Oral Histories Précis 19 May 2005

On the morning of April 9, 1942, 91 Bombers and 38 fighters (Tomlinson 138) launched an assault on the aircraft carrier HMS *Hermes* and the escorting destroyer HMAS *Vampire*, sinking both vessels off Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. A number of survivors of the event have elected to share their stories. The objective of these interviews is to compare archival images and documents with the recollections of the survivors in order to locate the position of *Vampire*, in relation to *Hermes*.

Interviewees:

Lloyd Saltmarsh

Lloyd was a seaman gunner (8 inch gun turret). He was on the bridge at the time of the raid so therefore had the best vantage point of all the survivors. He recalls seeing the shore and the palm trees so was fairly confident, at least initially, with his ability to swim to land after the sinking. Unfortunately tidal currents prevented him making any progress so after an hour he returned to the main group of survivors.

Bill Price

The *Vampire* was getting refitted in Singapore when he joined as a gunner. He notes that *Vampire* was unable to defend itself from an air raid due to the low angle of the deck guns. He was below decks loading the gum magazine during the raid. He was in the water for about 5 1/2 hours before the *Vita* picked him up, after rescuing the *Hermes* survivors first.

Vince Cesari

When the *Vampire* was bombed he was in the magazine/shell handling room. He never heard the 'abandon ship'. The lights started to go out, so he got on the phone to ring the bridge to find out what was going on but no one was answering. The ship started to list and at that point they escaped.

Rex Morgan

Rex Morgan, son of navy photographer Charles Morgan of HMS *Hermes*, returned to Sri Lanka in 1982. His objectives were:

1. To locate accurately the wreck of HMS *Hermes*
2. To provide photographic information on the posture and condition of the wreck
3. To provide information for the Sri Lankan Government on the breeding potential of edible fish in the region of the wreck (Morgan, 1984: 231).

The vessel was located on a bearing 217° from Batticaloa Light at a distance of 4.24 miles from the coastline. This is some 5 miles distant from the charted position (Morgan, 1984: 255). Despite this information being sent to the British Admiralty it appears that the current charts have not been updated.

Précis of events of 9 April 1942

Admiral Nagumo, under the command of Lieutenant-Commander Egusa launched eight 'Vals' against the *Hermes*.

Both vessels had turned North West, heading back to Trincomalee at full speed, 26 kts in the case of *Hermes* (Morgan, 1984: 153) after being informed of the impending raid.

It appears from oral recollections that the attack was witnessed by the Hospital Ship *Vita* (Morgan, 1984: 151). It also appears that the *Vita* was not targeted by the Japanese during the raid (L.N. Brownfield memoirs <<http://web.onetel.net.uk/~sunhouse/html/leslie1.html>>). This was the second time the *Vita* was spared from Japanese attack. On 31 March 1942 north of the Maldiv Islands. Lt Cdr Inaba of HIJMS Submarine *I-6* sighted an enemy vessel and initiated a torpedo approach. Just before releasing the torpedoes the target was identified as a HMHS *Vita* and he called off the attack (HIJMS Submarine *I-6*: Tabular Record of Movement: <<http://www.combinedfleet.com/I-6.html>>). Having completed few commercial voyages, RMS *Vita*, was taken over as an Indian Expeditionary Force ship in 1915 and converted for use as a hospital ship (<http://www.merchantnavyofficers.com/woodland.html>). *Vita* was deliberately bombed on 14 April 1941 while evacuating casualties from Tobruk <<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box35/t319t04.html>>. She was scrapped at Calcutta in 1949 <<http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/bisn.html>>.

Conclusions

The *Vampire* survivors all agree that HMS *Hermes* was astern of the *Vampire* and visible on the starboard quarter. They estimate that *Vampire* was within 1 nautical mile inshore of *Hermes* at the time of the raid and approximately 10 nm east of Batticaloa.

Rex Morgan located the wreck 5 nm inshore of the chart position

Appendix 2. Chronology of Events 9 April 1942 (From RN Battle Summaries)

0858 Japanese aircraft report intercepted at Colombo

0900 *Hermes* and *Vampire* set northwards course to return to Trincomalee

0930 Report translated: Sighting report of *Hermes*. OIC Trinco and *Hermes* informed and told that fighters would be dispatched from Ratmalana

1035 *Hermes* spotted enemy aircraft

1050 All way off the *Hermes* and it was listing heavily to port with the decks awash

1055 *Hermes* sinks

1055 *Vampire* under attack

1105 *Vampire's* stern sinks

1107 heavy underwater explosion (asdic set depth charged?)

M Okumiya

Staff Officer Japanese air force

1035 *Hermes* attacked

1050 *Hermes* sinks—*Vampire* already gone

W.W. Hall *Vampire* survivor

1105 *Hermes* attacked *first*

Hermes swings towards shore as though it was turning around but never makes the circle

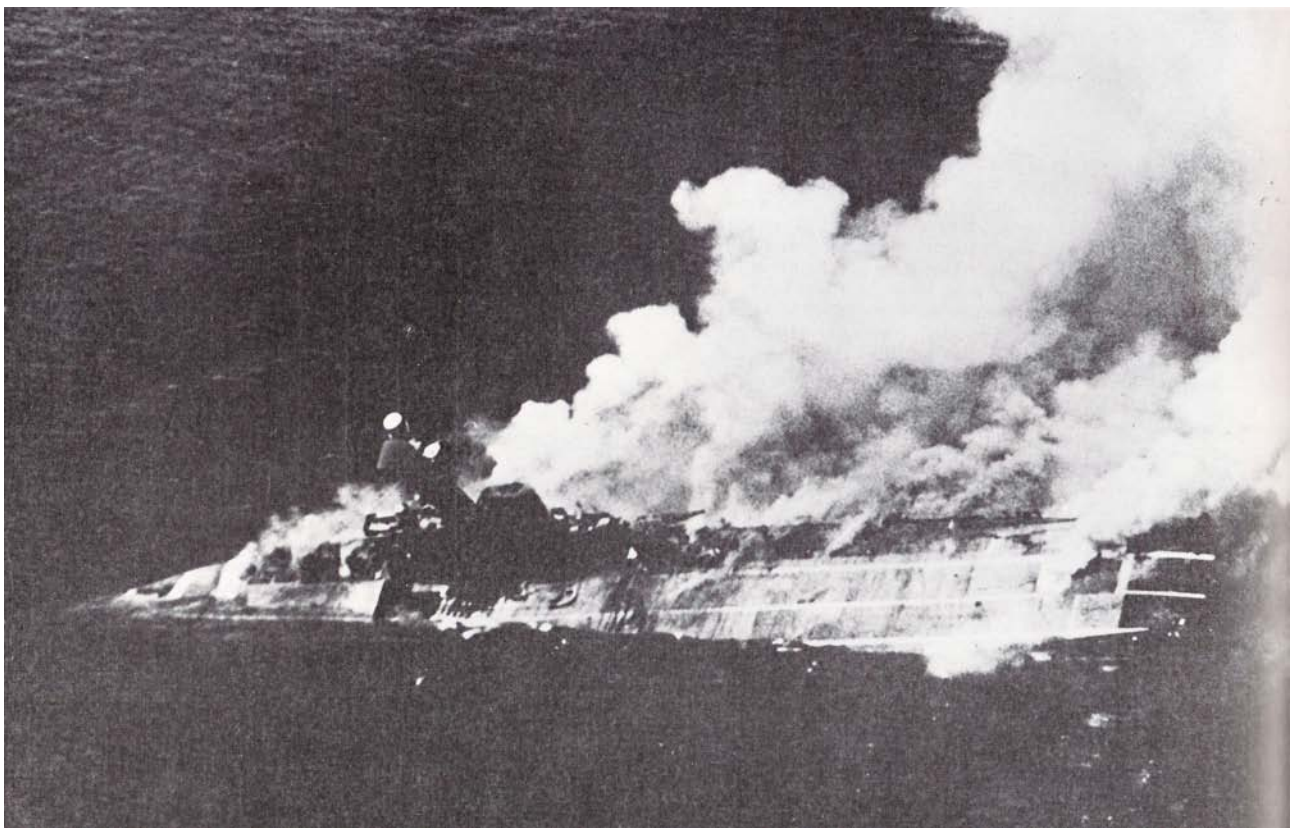


Figure 26. The *Hermes* sinking.



Figure 27. The bell from the Great Basses wreck site.

Appendix 3. The Basses Bell

During one of our filming episodes for the *Shipwreck Detectives*, a visit was made to a local diving shop in Hikkadua, a few kilometres north west of Galle. The proprietor showed us a bronze bell that he had recovered from the Great Basses wreck site. The bell (Fig. 26) was 365 mm high with a mouth diameter of 357 mm. The bell was abraded on one side with a section where the metal had completely disappeared leaving a hole. There was an inscription around upper section of the bell with the letters ...O GLORIA ANNO 1... It is assumed that the Latin inscription was SOLI DEO GLORIA, it is so irritating that the year has been obliterated as this would have given some form of conformation of the dating of the site. We know that the coins from the site are Mogul and date 1113 (Arabic) or 1702 AD. There is much evidence that the vessel was European, possibly, but not necessarily Dutch. The report is given here for general interest and to supplement the information already published on the subject (Clark, 1974; Green & Devendra, 1993b).

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