



Last US warship sunk by German sub during WWII discovered off Maine

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Divers have discovered the wreck of the last U.S. Navy warship sunk by a German submarine during World War II.

Patrol boat USS Eagle PE-56 was located by a private dive team just a few miles off the Maine coast. The discovery ends a 74-year mystery about the ship's location.

The sinking of the USS Eagle PE-56 on April 23, 1945, was originally blamed on a boiler explosion. But the Navy determined in 2001 that it had been sunk by a German submarine.

Garry Kozak, a specialist in undersea searches, announced this week that diver Ryan King, of Brentwood, N.H., confirmed in June 2018 that an object Kozak previously discovered on sonar is the vessel 300 feet down. Undated photo of an Eagle class patrol boat built during World War I. It is similar to the USS Eagle PE-56, which exploded and sank off Cape Elizabeth, Maine, on April 23, 1945, killing most of its crew in New England's worst naval disaster during World War II. (AP Photo/U.S. Navy, File)

King's team, which later began working with the Smithsonian Channel, extensively explored the ship on the ocean floor, five miles off Cape Elizabeth, Maine.

The Naval Historical Center notes that Eagle was towing targets for Navy dive bombers when she was sunk by the German U-853. Her sinking came just two weeks before V-E Day.

Only 13 of the 62 crew members survived; they were plucked from the water by a nearby Navy destroyer.

A plaque at Fort Williams Park at Cape Elizabeth, Maine, remembers those killed when the USS Eagle PE-56 was sunk during World War II on April 23, 1945.

Underwater video captured by the dive team will be aired in the fall on the Smithsonian Channel's "Hunt for Eagle 56," backing up the story of sailors who said an explosion broke the ship into two pieces, said Kozak.

Research undertaken by Paul Lawton, a Massachusetts attorney, naval historian and diver, played a key role in confirming the Eagle's sinking.

"With the deck guns, there was no mistaking it for what it was," he said. The U-853 was later sunk off Block Island on May 6, 1945, by depth charges from USS Atherton and USS Moberly. All hands were lost in the sub's sinking, which occurred two days before V-E Day, according to the Naval History and Heritage Command.

Researchers across the globe are working to locate sites of World War II wrecks. The wreck of an Australian freighter, for example, was recently discovered, as was the wreck of a U.S. B-24 bomber that plunged into the sea off Bermuda in Feb. 1945.

And earlier this year, the wreck of World War II aircraft carrier USS Wasp was found in the Coral Sea, and the RV Petrel discovered one of the first Japanese battleships to be sunk by U.S. forces during the war. Imperial Japanese Navy ship Hiei sank on Nov. 14, 1942, in the Solomon Islands.

Wasp was also spotted on the seabed by experts from the vessel RV Petrel, which is part of a research organization set up by the late billionaire Paul Allen.

Allen, Microsoft's co-founder, died in October 2018 from complications of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. His research organization has discovered a host of historic military shipwrecks, such as the wrecks of the USS Helena, the USS Lexington and the USS Juneau.

The group's biggest discovery, however, came in 2017, when Allen and his team found the long-lost wreck of the USS Indianapolis in the Philippine Sea.

In a separate project, the wreckage of U.S. B-24 bomber, for example, was found in Papua New Guinea. The plane's wreck was found in 2018, 74 years after it was shot down during a fierce battle with Japanese forces.

Last summer, a team of scientists from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California San Diego and the University of Delaware located the missing stern of the destroyer USS Abner Read, which was torn off by a Japanese mine in the remote Aleutian Islands.

Also last year, a decades-long mystery about the fate of a ship that disappeared during a World War II rescue mission was finally solved.

The wreck of the Empire Wold, a Royal Navy tug, was discovered by coastguards off the coast of Iceland. The ship sank on Nov. 10, 1944, with the loss of her 16 crewmembers.

An extremely rare World War II Spitfire fighter plane flown by a pilot who later took part in the "Great Escape" was also recovered from a remote Norwegian mountainside last year.

This story has been updated to reflect that U-853 was sunk off Block Island.

Fox News' Nicole Darrah and the Associated Press contributed to this article.

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