



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

An air ballast reserve tank pushes through the hull of the Japanese I-1 submarine off the coast of Guadalcanal. The submarine took part in the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Hawaii.

Ill-fated Pearl Harbor sub grounded at Guadalcanal

■ Japanese warcraft was present for many major moments in the Pacific

Lost in time on a reef off the western coast of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands in the southwest Pacific is the Japanese submarine I-1. The sub is one of many sunken ships in the infamous waters of the Solomon Islands known as Iron Bottom Sound.

The nearby waters are named in recognition of the numerous sunken warships from both sides that bravely fought to control the seas during the early days of the battle of Guadalcanal.

The I-1 is one of the few World War II Japanese submarines in the world that can be seen by divers. It is no ordinary submarine. The I-1 was a witness to many early war events in World War II, including the attack on Pearl Harbor. Her mission that day was to patrol the Oahu-Kauai Channel west of Pearl Harbor for naval vessels.

After the day of infamy, Dec. 7, 1941, she moved eastward and shelled Kahului, Maui and Hilo.

The I-1 was then redeployed and participated in the Japanese occupation in

MIKE
PHELAN

GUEST COLUMNIST



Mike Phelan has logged more than 2,000 scientific dives since certification in 1966.

the Aleutian Islands.

Afterward, while undergoing dry dock maintenance in Japan, her crew witnessed the Doolittle Raid.

Her final mission was to ferry troop reinforcements and supplies to the Japanese army fighting on Guadalcanal.

The I-1 was an older submarine built in 1926 by Kawasaki. She was designed as a long-range covert supply boat and capable of traveling 24,400 nautical miles.

Additionally, she later was retrofitted with a water-tight supply container for transporting supplies outside of her

pressure hull behind her conning tower or "sail." The I-1 was a large submarine for her time, with a length of 320 feet. Her beam (width) was 30 feet in comparison with a typical German U-boat with a beam of only 22 feet.

The sub sits on the outer reef slope with her stern resting in 100 feet of water. She was destroyed in action Jan. 29, 1943, attempting to reinforce Japanese troops on Guadalcanal at night. After a depth charge attack by two New Zealand frigates, HMSNZ Moa and Kiwi, she was beached by her commander on the fringing reef in an attempt to save her crew. Twenty-seven crew members died as the sea flooded the hull and the resulting chlorine gas from its massive batteries fouled the air.

Sixty-six crew members were able to make it to the shore under night's cover, and an unknown number of soldiers also fled to shore.

The commander, Sakamoto Eiichi, was killed in action that night. It is rumored that the sub's primary mission was to de-

liver new communication codes to the Japanese forces operating on Guadalcanal. Several unsuccessful attempts were made by the Japanese in the following hours and days to destroy the sub completely.

Today, the I-1 sits silently among the surrounding colorful corals and tropical reef fish.

My dives inside the sub were a challenge. Wiring hangs from the ceilings. Machinery, pipes and valves are askew and frozen in place, making travel within the hull confusing and difficult. The narrow compartments are filled with silt and rust, and a silt-out can occur at any moment, making exit very problematic.

Despite the limited dive times due to depth considerations, my visits to the I-1 were a firsthand glimpse into a time and place that history has almost forgotten.

Phelan, of Stuart, is an avid diver and fish counter for the Reef Environmental and Education Foundation (REEF.org). Before retiring, he worked for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.