

THE LOST BOMBERS OF BRINDISI

2018 EXPEDITION



Report of the project "The Lost Bombers of Brindisi" – first expedition 2018 – Flag #221

The "The Lost Bombers of Brindisi" expedition took place from November 3, 2018 to November 17, 2018. The aim of the expedition was to find the wreckage of two Polish four-engine Halifax and Liberator planes from the 1586th Special Duty Squadron stationed in Brindisi, Italy, and the wreck of a Consolidated B-24 heavy bomber from the US 885th Bomber Squadron. These planes crashed in 1944-1945 in the Adriatic Sea during landing at Campo Casale in Brindisi under unexplained circumstances.

The expedition was organized by the Shipwreck Expeditions Association in cooperation with the Historical Aviation Foundation of Poland in Warsaw, the Institute of Archeology of the University of Warsaw, the Museum of the University of Warsaw, and the Pilecki Institute in Warsaw. The association also invited professor of Maritime Archaeology, professor Timmy Gambin from the University of Malta, an expert in the use of sonar equipment and interpretation of sonar images, and professor Chris Clark of the Laboratory of Autonomous Intelligent Robots in California, who provided two students with a specialized underwater vehicle, AUV (Autonomous Underwater Vehicle), for a precise, autonomous search of the designated area.



Search area for the missing aircrafts
(photo: Chris Kraska)



Team members prepare to search for the wrecks of the lost aircrafts (photo: Peter Wytykowski)

The association also benefited from the help of a very experienced Italian technical diver, Gianmichele Iaria, who was responsible for the expedition's dive operations. The Institute of Archeology and the Museum of the University of Warsaw, represented by professor Dr. Jerzy Miziołk and Dr. Hubert Kowalski, assisted the project by obtaining the required permits for underwater research from local authorities as well as supporting the expedition with their experience in underwater research. Additionally, the Polish Aviation Historical Foundation, represented by Piotr Hodyra and Wojciech Zmysłony, was responsible for the historical inquiry regarding the disasters mentioned above.

Thanks to a detailed analysis of archival reports, an area of ten square kilometers was selected for the search. After arrival at the local accommodations, the team started preparing the equipment and making preparations to search the desig-



Preparing to go out to sea (photo: Hubert Kowalski)



En route to the designated area (photo: Peter Wytykowski)

Thanks to a detailed analysis of archival reports, an area of ten square kilometers was selected for the search. After arrival at the local accommodations, the team started preparing the equipment and making preparations to search the designated area. Due to the whims of weather, a strong north wind and waves up to three meters high, the beginning of the search was delayed until Tuesday, November 6th.



Preparation of the AUV for the search (photo: Mariusz Borowiak)

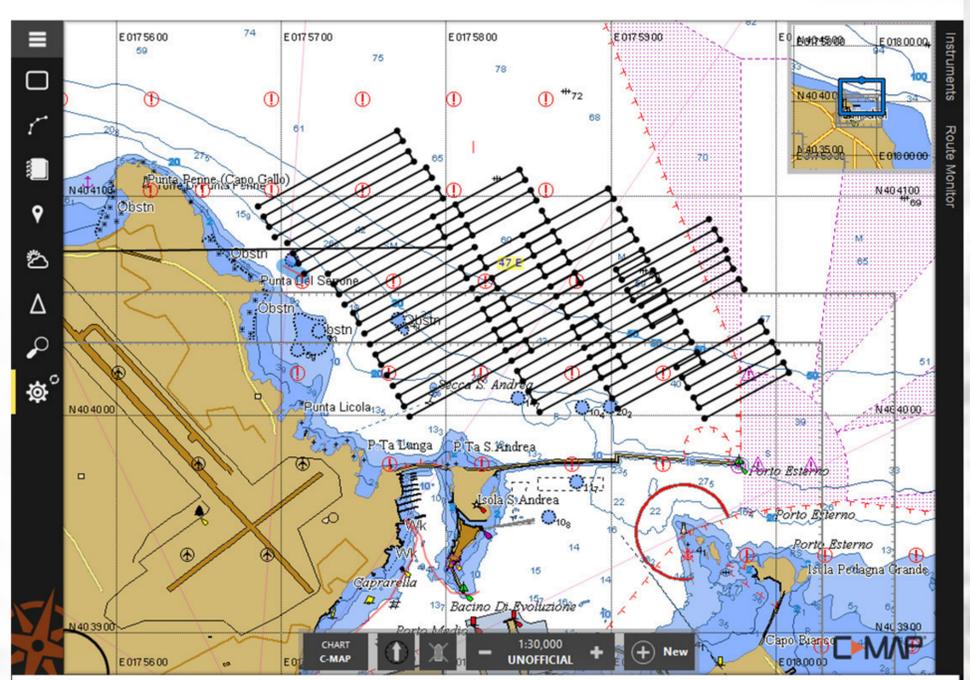


AUV after completing the search mission (photo: Peter Wytykowski)

The search group worked at sea from 05:30 to 17:00 hrs. During a short break, participants returned around 11:00 to the base to recharge the AUV vehicle batteries for two hours. The weather from the beginning of the expedition was unfavorable and, to a large extent, did not allow for productive research at sea. However, thanks to the determination of the search team made up of professor Timmy Gambin, Russell Bingham, Erick Contee, Krzysztof Korszewski, Mariusz Borowiak, and Peter Wytykowski, over six square kilometers of the previously planned area were searched. Sonar devices installed on the AUV registered more than 20 objects located at a depth of 40 to 60 meters, some of which may well be the sought after aircrafts.

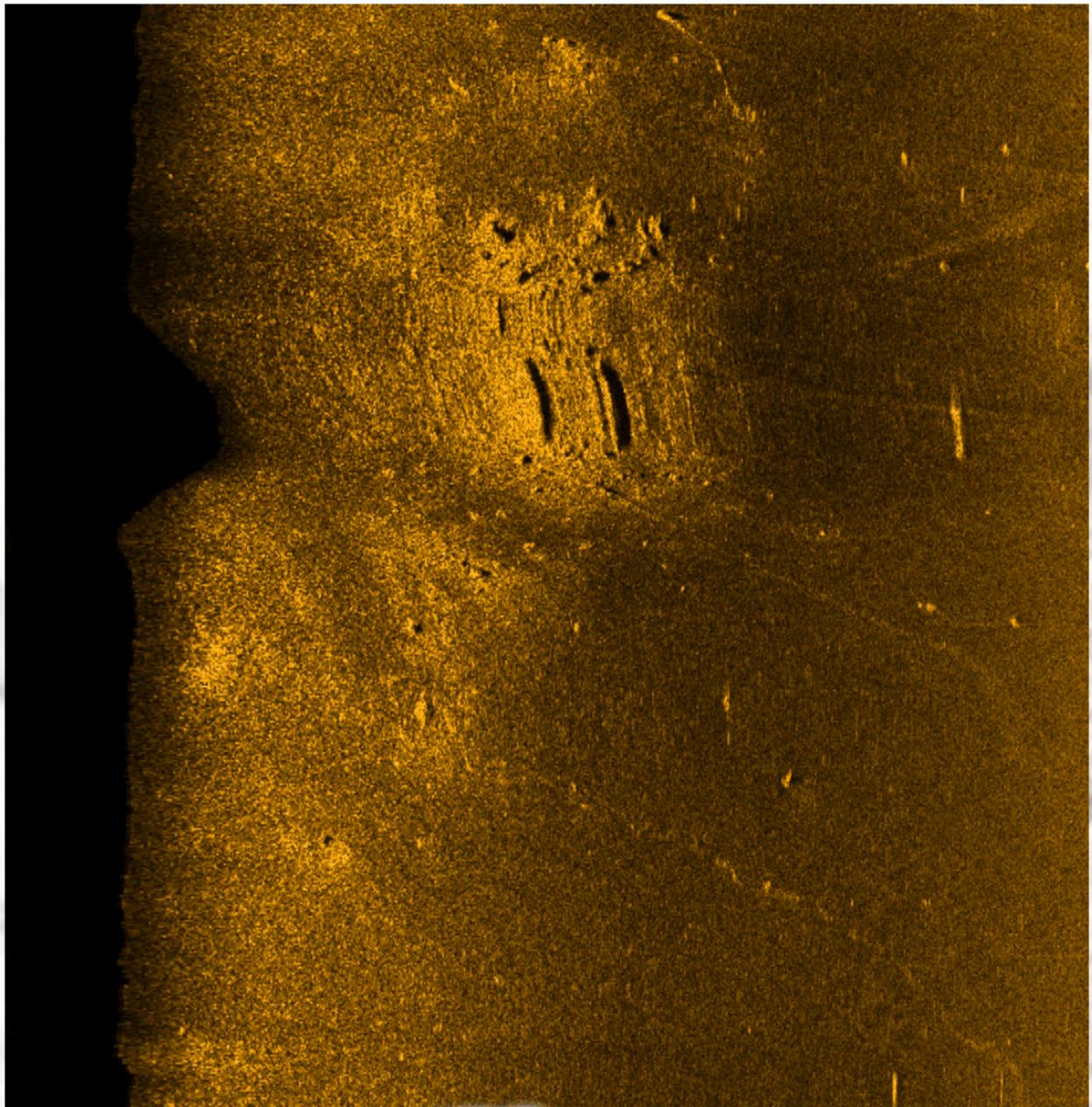
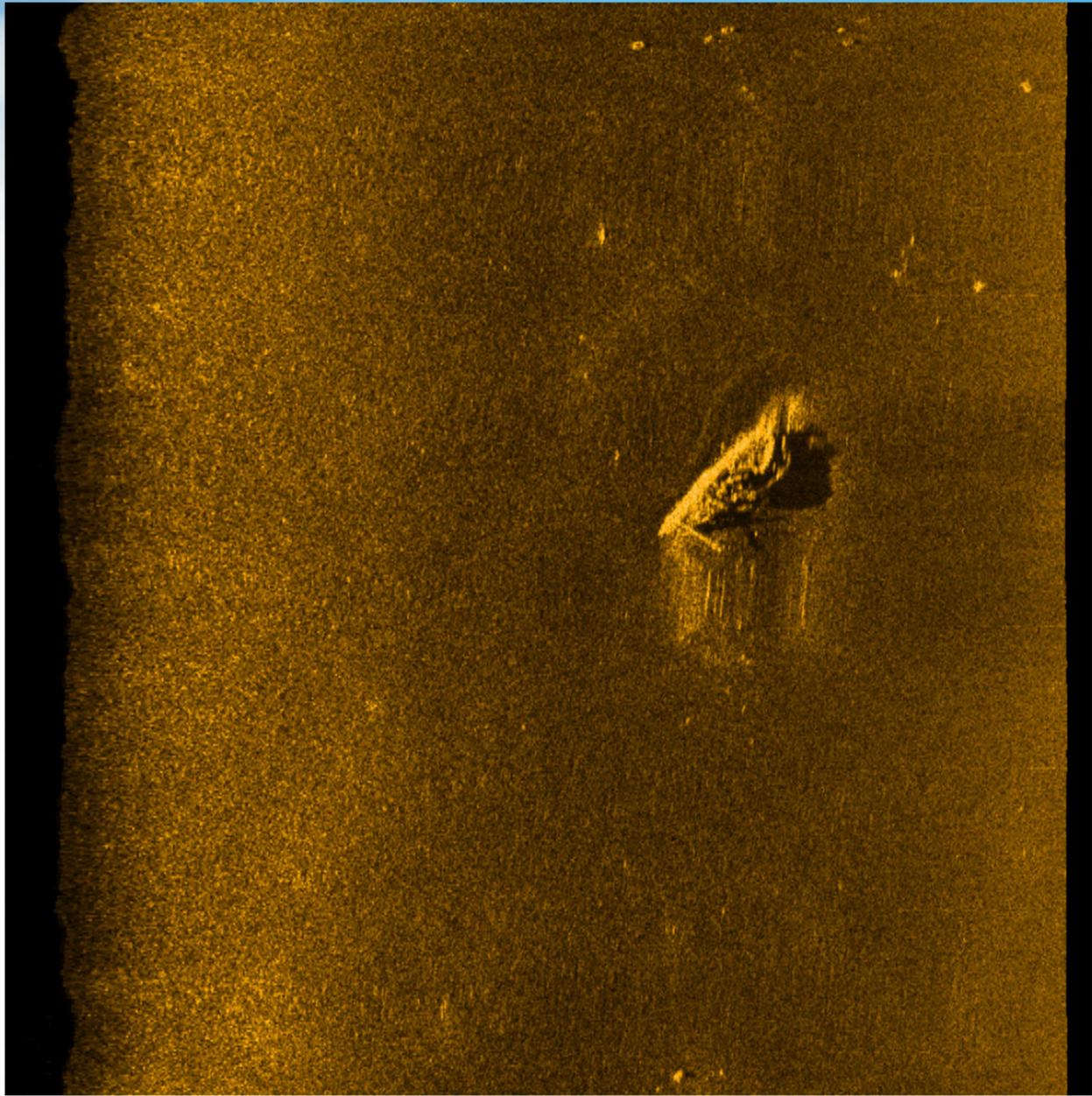


Zone of searched sectors during the expedition in 2018
(photo: Timmy Gambin)

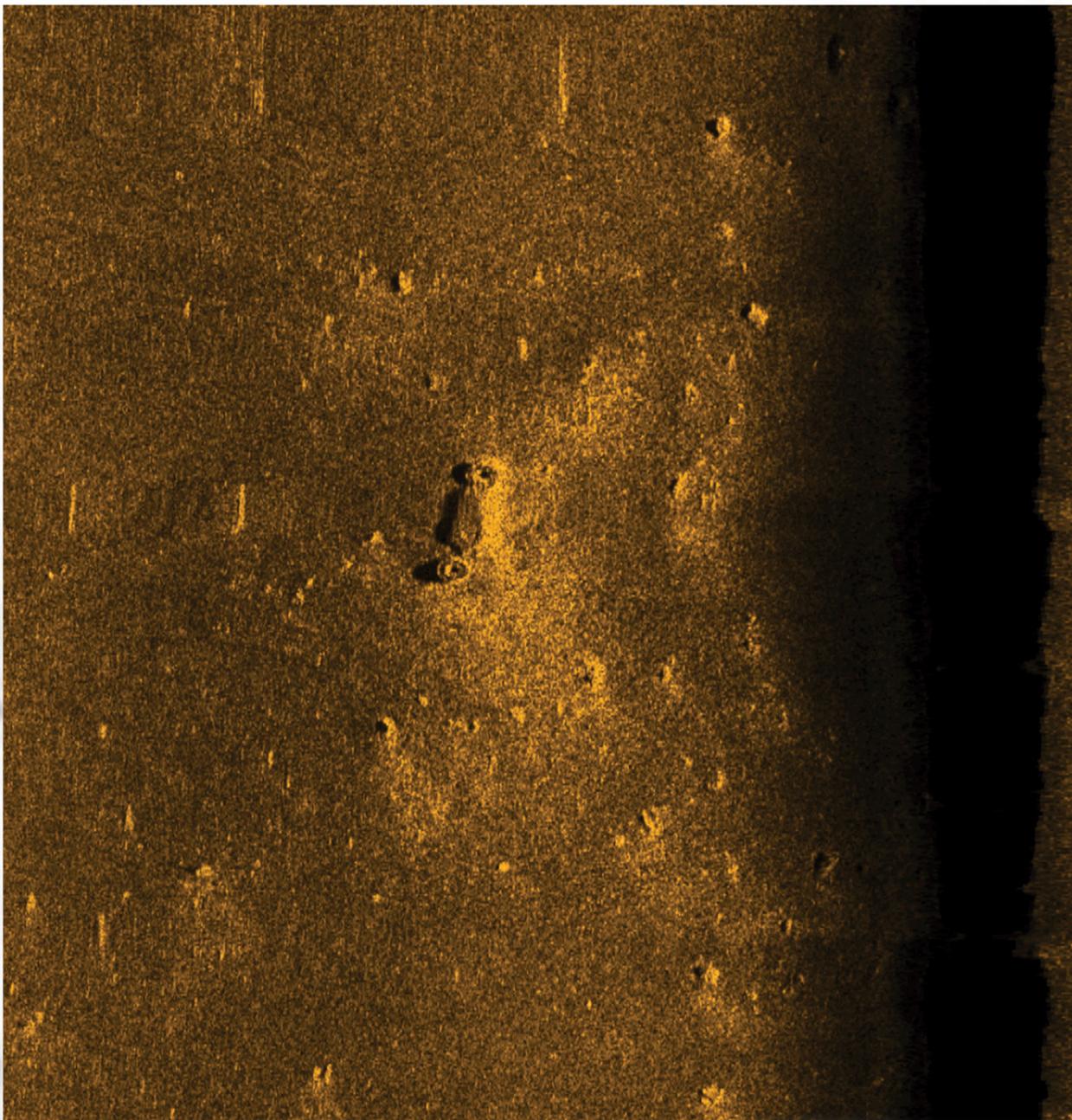
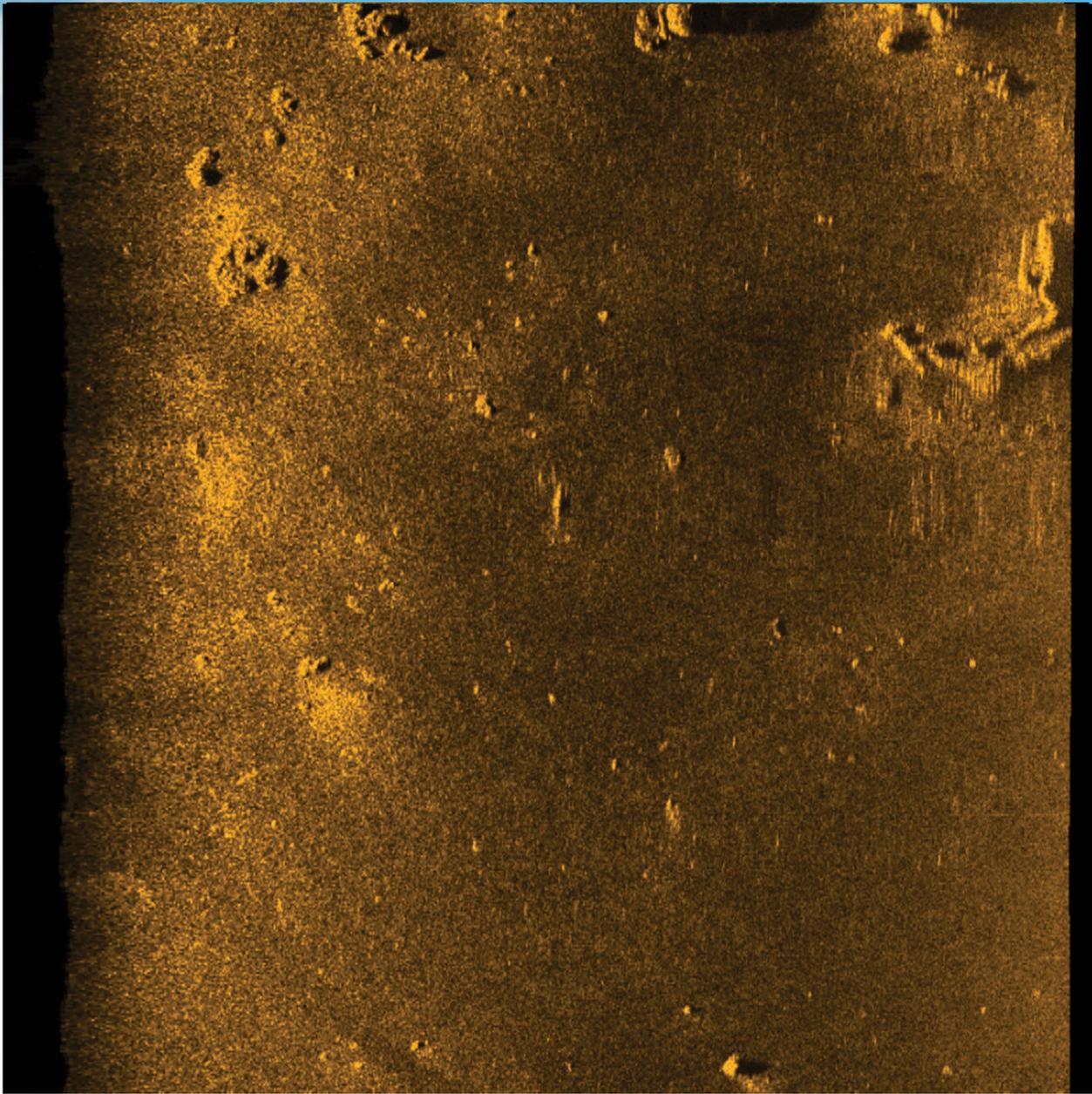


Detailed image of the AUV (photo: Krzysztof Korszewski)

On November 12th, a group of technical divers led by Gianmichele Iaria and composed of Roman Zajder, Sabatino Bianco, Scott DelaPeruta and Piotr Kardasz, began to check the object registered by sonar. Unfortunately, due to the deteriorating weather conditions (high tide and strong current), the diving was only possible for two days, after which it was necessary to interrupt in order not to expose the divers working underwater to undue risk. Only four objects were checked, none of which could be identified as the remains of an aircraft.



Objects found on the seabed with sonar installed on the AUV
(photos: Timmy Gabin)



Objects found on the seabed with sonar installed on the AUV
(photos: Timmy Gabin)

On days that did not allow research at sea, members of the expedition met with the local diving and aviation community as well as with historians who could provide additional information about the aircrafts that they were looking for. It was possible for the team to contact and interview Flora Russo, a resident of Brindisi with whom lived Polish aviator, gunner Józef Dunin-Borkowski, while he was stationed in Brindisi from October 1944 to February 1945. Additional inquiries were made in the local archives. The most fruitful, however, was a meeting with the commander-in-chief of the Italian military air force in Brindisi, Colonel Giambattista Degiuli. The colonel was able to detail, from an airman's viewpoint, the landing approach maneuvers used at this particular airfield. Thanks to the knowledge gained from the commander, the search area has been updated and is now more precise, improving the likelihood of future success.



Divers prepare to check the objects located on the sonar (photo: Mariusz Borowiak)

Thanks to media exposure about the project, daughter of gunner Stanisław Słowik contacted the expedition team. Her father reportedly died when his plane crashed into the sea on approach on January 19, 1945 and it is highly probable that his remains are still at the wreck site.



Divers ready for the dive (photo: Roman Zajder)

After arriving in Poland on November 17th, at a meeting at the University of Warsaw, members of the expedition handed over all available materials from the London archives about the service of S. Słowik in the Polish Armed Forces in the West during the Second World War to the family of the fallen pilot.



Meeting with the commander of the Air Base in Brindisi, Colonel Giambattista Degiuli (photo: Peter Wytykowski)



Exchange of documents regarding the service of S. Słowik to the family (photo: Roman Zajder)



Meeting with the family of S. Słowik at the University of Warsaw (photo: Roman Zajder)



Documents on S. Słowik (photo: Roman Zajder)

Conclusions:

Due to the timing of the expedition (November) and the related weather problems, it was not possible to fully implement the search. Plans are being made to return to Brindisi in September 2019, when the forecasts predict weather conditions allowing for safe research at sea.

The next expedition should be planned for a period of not less than two weeks. Due to the experience gained during the first expedition, this amount of time will allow for the completion of the search of the designated area and its expansion to the area located northeast from the axis of the runway as it was operated during the stationing of the Polish squadron in Brindisi in 1944-1945.

Plans are for the technical divers to examine other objects found during the first expedition in November 2018. An additional query is required at the National Archives in London, the National Archives in Washington, and at the Air Force Historical Research Agency in Maxwell, Alabama, all of which have detailed materials from the period and the region of interest. The purpose of the query is to locate the reports of rescue units that were stationed at Campo Casale in Brindisi. Information on how rescue operations were undertaken immediately after aircraft disasters could help to determine more precisely the location of the missing aircrafts.

Completed on Friday, December 6, 2018

Report written by Peter Wytykowski MN' 12 & Roman Zajder MI' 12

Edited by Chris Kraska MN' 18

Graphic design and text composition by Krzysztof Korszewski

