

# The Maritime Observatory

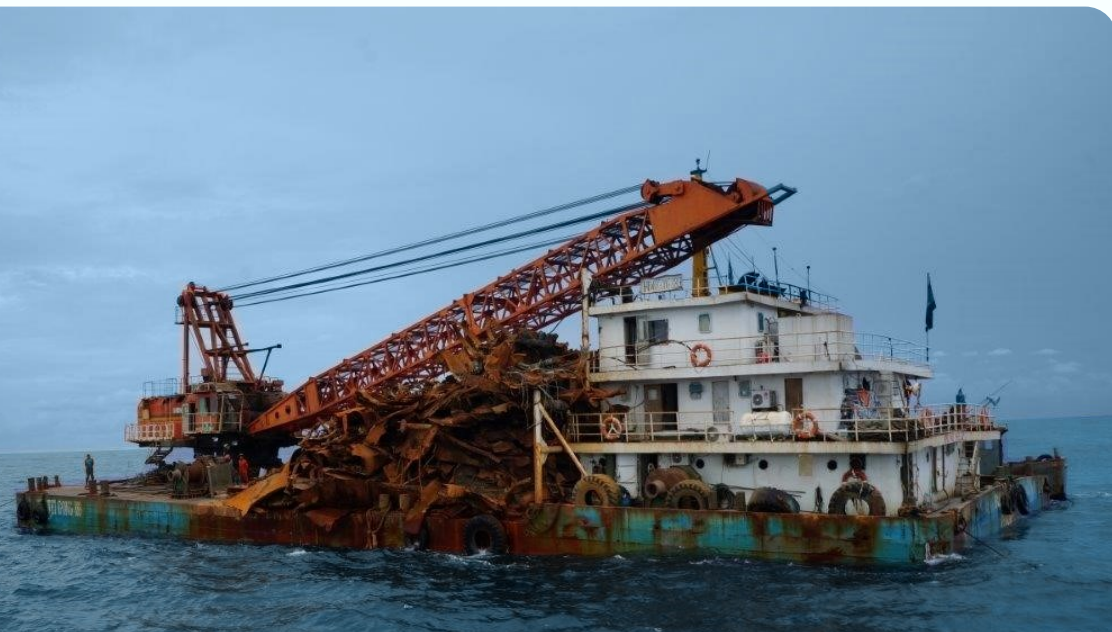
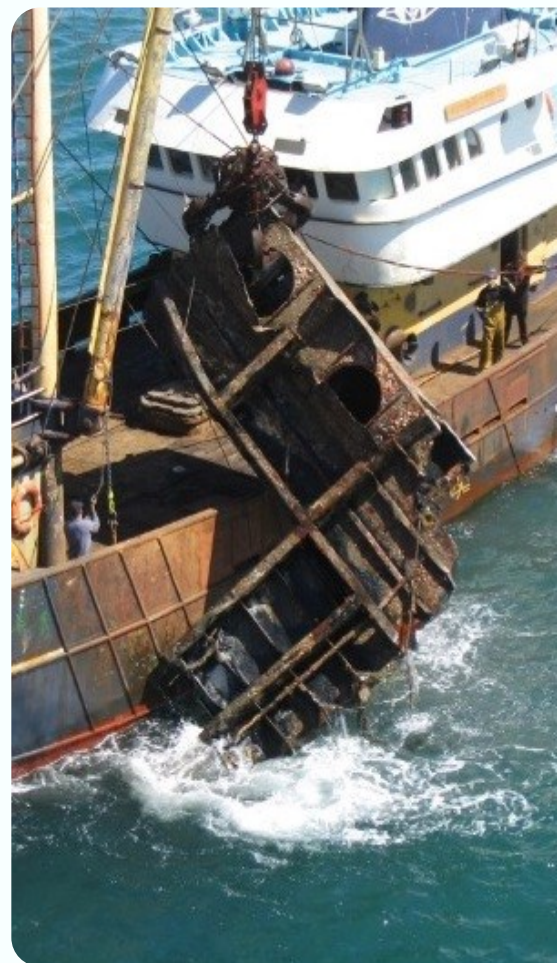
## Our vision to protect undersea heritage

It was a spring day in May 1916 when 1,285 sailors boarded the battle cruiser HMS *Queen Mary*, on what became their final voyage. There, in the midst of the North Sea, they took part in the largest naval battle of World War I, the Battle of Jutland. When violent, thunderous explosions ripped through the ship in a shock of flames and smoke, nearly every member of the crew lost their lives, finding their final resting place on the seabed. Just 19 survived. Less than 100 years later, a salvage barge is mercilessly looting the revered wreck, plundering her for precious metals and artefacts, and desecrating the graves of our war heroes.

**“We’re collaborating to protect ocean life and our world heritage,” says Nick Wise, CEO of OceanMind. “Ultimately, we want to be able to watch every wreck – getting the right information to the right people, at the right time – to help eliminate the looting of shipwrecks.”**

Their story is far from unique. More than 50 major, well preserved World War II military wrecks representing countless war dead from the United States, Europe, Australia and Japan have disappeared from the Java Sea since 2012. And across the world, the unscrupulous looting of historic shipwrecks is escalating out of control.

Criminals are becoming ever more sophisticated, accessing previously inaccessible vessels and exploiting the ambiguity of maritime law in international waters. Meanwhile, protected sites remain largely ‘invisible’ to the authorities and the public, too costly to monitor and patrol, and beyond the boundaries of daily life. This fundamental disrespect for naval war graves sits in direct contrast to the respect afforded to fallen servicemen on land.



Beyond this, the devastation of important wrecks results in the loss of culturally important artefacts, environmental pollution from leaking oil or unstable military supplies, and damage to local livelihoods that rely on the sites for tourism and fishing. The extraction of unexploded ordnance also poses a distinct risk, particularly if sold illegally.

Yet putting a stop to the criminal looting of wrecks has been almost impossible – until now. The Maritime Observatory is turning the tables on unauthorised salvage for good. An unprecedented, not-for-profit collaboration between high technology ocean surveillance expert OceanMind, and maritime heritage and advocacy specialist MAST, the Maritime Observatory is changing the game. Together, they are making the invisible, visible, and the unknown, known.

“Naval war graves are the final resting places of those who sacrificed themselves for their country.” says Jessica Berry, MAST’s CEO. We aim to detect and deter looters from pillaging wrecks, helping to ensure that maritime heritage is preserved for all people for all time.”

There is a huge disparity between the protection given to military remains on land and on the seabed, which has enabled WWI and II wrecks to be ravaged and particularly vulnerable to looting. However, no wreck is immune from interference, and older archaeological sites containing both merchant ships and warships are also at risk. Once irrevocably damaged, we will lose their stories and a part of our cultural heritage will be gone forever.

### How does the partnership work?

Leveraging its proven expertise in combining satellite imagery and data analytics to protect the world’s oceans, OceanMind identifies irregular patterns in shipping activities, cross-referencing with thousands of rules, regulations and records to identify signs of suspicious activity. Increasingly, the team is using artificial intelligence to automate this complex process and enable the real-time identification of suspected illegal looting at scale – 365 days a year, anywhere in the world. Their findings create alerts for MAST’s maritime heritage experts to investigate the issue in more detail, tapping into its specialist knowledge of wreck sites, known salvage players and robust intelligence networks. The teams’ combined, unbiased intelligence is then provided to the relevant authorities and law enforcement bodies to inform decision-making and action. It’s the simplest, most cost-effective way for governments to gain a full picture of illegal looting activity at sea.

## What's the story so far?

To prove the value of its work, the Maritime Observatory conducted a pilot project monitoring 11 historic shipwreck sites around the world and tracking vessel movements over a three-year period. The team monitored the level of activity at each site, checking for signs of unauthorised salvage operations, and reviewed 24 suspected high risk vessels to identify their potential targets. The findings were astonishing: vessels going 'dark' by switching off tracking devices, evidence of plundered shipwrecks linked to financial and investment fraud, and even networks of businesses supporting unauthorised salvage operations throughout South-East Asia, for example.

## What's next and how can I help?

The Maritime Observatory is already working with governments to provide in-depth analysis and satellite imagery of suspected looting. But we can't do this alone. We need your help to scale up our activities and help protect these historic sites. We're ready to provide support to both the United States and United Kingdom, as major owners of warship wrecks. But it doesn't end here. With more funding, we could also offer support to the governments of developing countries, helping to overcome the financial and logistical barriers to preserving maritime heritage.

**"The threat of looting starts with the wreck's discovery and, in our generation, they will be gone if we don't act now" concludes Berry. "The Maritime Observatory represents a turning point in the protection of underwater heritage sites. It will empower governments and agencies to protect historic shipwrecks and naval war graves, preventing their disappearance and honouring the memories of those who gave their lives for our freedom."**

**To learn more or to enquire how you can help, please contact**  
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