



## Media Release

For Immediate Release

### **Submersible crew completes the world's deepest shipwreck dive in history (USS Johnston)**

March 31, 2021

Offshore Samar Island, Philippines Sea

An expedition privately funded and executed by two former US Navy Officers has successfully re-located, surveyed, and filmed the USS *Johnston*, the world's deepest known shipwreck that principally lies at a depth of 21,180ft (6,456m). The funder of the expedition, Victor Vescovo, is a former US Navy Commander (Ret.) who personally piloted his submersible DSV *Limiting Factor* down to the wreck during two separate, eight-hour dives. These constituted the deepest wreck dives, manned or unmanned, in history.

The USS *Johnston* (DD-557) was a US Navy Fletcher-class destroyer that sank in battle on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1944. The *Johnston* measured 376 ft (115m) long with a beam of 39ft. The ship was sunk during an intense battle against vastly superior Japanese forces off the coast of Samar Island during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, widely cited as the largest naval battle in history. "In no engagement in its entire history has the United States Navy shown more gallantry, guts and gumption than in the two morning hours between 0730 and 0930 off Samar," wrote Rear Admiral Samuel E. Morison in his [History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II](#). Upon the commissioning of the ship, the destroyer's  $\frac{3}{4}$  Native American Captain from Oklahoma, Commander Ernest Evans, told his crew that he would "never run from a fight," and that "anyone who did not want to go in harm's way, had better get off now." None of his crew did so.

The wreck, the deepest shipwreck ever located, was originally discovered in 2019 by the late Paul Allen's vessel R/V *Petrel* under the leadership of renowned ocean wreck explorer Robert Kraft. On that expedition, film of pieces of the vessel were taken by a remotely-operated vehicle (ROV), but the majority of the wreck including its upright, intact forward two-thirds including bow, bridge, and mid-section lay deeper than the ROV's rated depth limit of approximately 20,000ft (6,000m). It has now been discovered that its hull number "557" is clearly visible on both sides of its bow and two full 5" gun turrets, twin torpedo racks, and multiple gun mounts are still in place and visible on the

Caladan Oceanic, LLC  
6715 Orchid Lane  
Dallas, TX, 75230



superstructure. No human remains or clothing were seen at any point during the dives and nothing was taken from the wreck.

The submersible DSV *Limiting Factor* has no operating depth limitation, does not require a tether to the surface, and can hold two occupants for real-time visitation and analysis of wrecks. The craft is highly manoeuvrable and carries an array of high-definition and 4K cameras. The submersible is best known as the vehicle that Vescovo piloted to the deepest points in each of the world's five over oceans during the 'Five Deeps Expedition' in 2019. It recently completed its 14<sup>th</sup> dive to the Challenger Deep, the deepest point on Earth (10,925 meters). An original, five-part series about the Five Deeps expedition airs this Thursday, April 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 on the Discovery Plus streaming channel.

Extensive research by naval historian and Annapolis alumnus LCDR Parks Stephenson, USN (Ret.) allowed the position of the wreck to be plotted as part of the development of a dive plan. "We used data from both the US and the Japanese accounts and as is so often the case the research brings the history back to life. Reading the accounts of the *Johnston*'s last day are humbling and need to be preserved as upholding the highest traditions of the Navy. This was mortal combat against incredible odds."

Vescovo has held ongoing discussions with Navy History and Heritage Command (NHHC) about investigation of the wreck and the protocols for not only preserving it but respecting it as the final resting place for many of its crew. All of the sonar data, imagery and field notes collected by the expedition is not to be made public but will, however, be provided to the US Navy for dissemination as it deems appropriate at its sole discretion. "We have a strict 'look, don't touch' policy but we collect a lot of material that is very useful to historians and naval archivists. I believe it is important work, which is why I fund it privately and we deliver the material to the Navy *pro-bono*." said Vescovo.

Rear Admiral Samuel Cox, Director of Naval History and Curator for the Navy said "The Naval History and Heritage Command greatly appreciates the efforts of Commander Vescovo and his expedition team in positively identifying the wreck of the destroyer USS *Johnston* (DD-557,) lost on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1944 in one of the most heroic actions in the entire history of the U.S. Navy. Commander Ernest Evans and his entire crew went above and beyond the call of duty engaging an overwhelming and vastly superior Japanese force to buy time for the escort carriers he was charged with protecting, to escape. The *Johnston* was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation -- the highest award that can be given to a ship. Evans was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor, the first Native American in the U.S. Navy and only one of two destroyer skippers in World War II to be so honored.



“The wreck of *Johnston* is a hallowed site,” continued Rear Admiral Cox, “I deeply appreciate that Commander Vescovo and his team exhibited such great care and respect during the survey of the ship, the last resting place of her valiant crew. Three other heroic ships lost in that desperate battle have yet to be found.”

The highly manoeuvrable submersible was able to conduct a thorough survey of the wreck to verify its identity, construct a map of its layout, and obtain high-definition imagery that can be used by naval historians. “We need to take great care to make sure that the ship remains completely undisturbed and I believe that can be very effectively done in manned craft, especially as the depth here precludes most remotely operated vehicles. We could see the extent of the wreckage and the severe damage inflicted during the intense battle on the surface. It took fire from the largest warship ever constructed -- the Imperial Japanese Navy battleship *Yamato*, and ferociously fought back. All of the accounts pay tribute to the crew’s bravery and complete lack of hesitation in taking the fight to the enemy, and the wreckage serves to prove that” said Parks.

This brings clarity to the loss the USS *Johnston* and helps close a chapter on one of the greatest last stands in all naval history -- which ended in a completely unpredictable American victory against enormous odds. The verification of the wreck as the *Johnston* also highlights the story of its Captain who immediately attacked ships up to twenty times his size to defend a near-defenseless support fleet nearby. “It was ‘the Alamo’ at sea,” Vescovo, a native Texan added, “but in this case the defenders -- unbelievably -- won.”

Expedition leader Kelvin Murray (EYOS Expeditions) commented “This was a real team effort requiring the individual skills of everyone onboard. Our EM-124 sonar, Triton Submarine’s unlimited depth submersible, a highly practiced team and some excellent sonar and navigation support all combined to enable a successful outcome. With this system we could locate, investigate and film wrecks at any depth in any ocean; it is a fantastic tool”.

At the conclusion of the expedition the DSSV *Pressure Drop* came to a stop, sounded the ship’s whistle, and a wreath was laid on the oceanic battlefield. Vescovo commented: “In some ways we have come full circle. The *Johnston* and our own ship were built in the same shipyard, and both served in the US Navy. As a US Navy officer, I’m proud to have helped bring clarity and closure to the *Johnston*, its crew, and the families of those who fell there.”

For any Press enquiries, please contact John Cotton:

M: +44 (0)7788 276 922

E: [john@jcapr.co.uk](mailto:john@jcapr.co.uk)

Caladan Oceanic, LLC  
6715 Orchid Lane  
Dallas, TX, 75230



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## **Notes to Editors:**

### **Dive and Other Notes**

The three divers that executed the record-breaking missions were:

- Victor L. Vescovo, Commander, US Navy (Retired). Pilot on all three dives and sole sponsor of the expedition.
- Parks Stephenson, Lieutenant Commander, US Navy (Retired). Expedition historian, navigator, and mission specialist.
- Shane Eigler, Senior Submarine Technician, Triton Submarines. Mission specialist.

The wreck of the *Johnston* was located:

- In water 62% deeper than where the RMS *Titanic* lay in the North Atlantic.
- A much smaller, and therefore far more difficult wreck to locate, the *Johnston* was also approximately 43% the length and just 5% of the total displacement (overall size) of *Titanic*.

### **About Caladan Oceanic**

Caladan Oceanic is a private company dedicated to the advancement of undersea technology and supporting expeditions to increase the understanding of the deep oceans. Founder Victor Vescovo has long had a passion for exploration and has summited the highest peak on all seven of the world's continents including Mt. Everest and skied at least 100 kilometers to both the North and South Poles. With the completion of the Five Deeps Expedition in August 2019, Vescovo became the first person in history to have been to the top of all the world's continents, both poles, and the bottom of all its oceans. He was awarded the Explorer's Club Medal in March 2020 and as of March 2021, has descended to the bottom of Challenger Deep in the Mariana Trench a record twelve times. For more information, please visit <https://caladanoceanic.com/>.

### **About Triton Submarines, LLC**

Triton Submarines of Sebastian, Florida, is the most experienced civil submarine producer in the world today – and the only contemporary manufacturer of acrylic-pressure-hull-equipped personal submarines to deliver multiple classed and certified vessels capable of diving to 3,300 feet (1,000 meters). Triton Submarines senior staff have over 350 years of combined experience with more than 80 different submersibles, and their operations team have together logged over 25,000 dives. Triton clients also



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enjoy superlative after-sales service and technical support from a company dedicated to their total satisfaction. For more information, please visit <https://tritonsubs.com/>.

### **About EYOS Expeditions**

EYOS Expeditions has been designing complex and challenging expeditions for private vessels since 2008. Drawing on the decades of experience of the company's co-founders, the EYOS team have delivered over 1,200 safe and successful expeditions to some of the most remote destinations on Earth. EYOS Expeditions holds several "world firsts" and routinely take clients to destinations rarely or never before visited. EYOS Expeditions have worked behind the scenes on many of the industry's groundbreaking itineraries while maintaining the highest standards of safety, professionalism and environmental stewardship. EYOS Expeditions is today regarded as the industry leader for planning and operating remote expeditions using submersibles. For more information visit <https://www.eyos-expeditions.com/>.