

Expedition Reveals Thirteen Shipwrecks from WWII Battles off Guadalcanal



From Clifford Davis, Naval History and Heritage Command, Aug. 12, 2025

HONIARA, Solomon Islands – A multinational expedition led by the Ocean Exploration Trust aboard the Exploration Vessel (E/V) Nautilus has completed a groundbreaking archaeological

survey of more than a dozen World War II era shipwrecks in Iron Bottom Sound, August 1, 2025.

During the 22-day mission, which included the visual identification of multiple historically significant vessels, the team surveyed 13 wreck sites, including four ships documented for the first time. Among the newly identified wrecks are the bow of the heavy cruiser USS New Orleans (CA 32) and the Imperial Japanese destroyer Teruzuki, both lost during intense naval battles in the Guadalcanal campaign.

Other vessels surveyed in high resolution include:

USS Vincennes (CA 44)

USS Astoria (CA 34)

USS Quincy (CA 39)

USS Northampton (CA 26)

USS Laffey (DD 459)

USS DeHaven (DD 469)

USS Preston (DD 379)

USS Walke (DD 416)

HMAS Canberra (D33)

Imperial Japanese Navy destroyer Yudachi

and an unidentified landing barge.

“It was wonderful to return to Iron Bottom Sound, where we discovered Japanese, Australian, and American warships over 34

years ago," said Dr. Robert Ballard, President of Ocean Exploration Trust. "This expedition was special, allowing us to film these sites in a manner not possible back then, as well as document other ships, while at the same time sharing our work live to the entire world."

The surveys were conducted using advanced underwater robotic systems, including remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) deployed from Nautilus, and an uncrewed surface vehicle (USV), DriX, operated remotely from a shore-based station in Honiara. The DriX system, developed by the University of New Hampshire, mapped over 1,000 square kilometers of seafloor, producing the highest-resolution maps of Iron Bottom Sound to date and identifying dozens of potential targets.

"The use of our uncrewed vessel allowed a tremendous increase in exploration efficiency as we were able to continuously map and identify potential targets while the Nautilus was deploying its ROVs," said Dr. Larry Mayer, Director, Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping at the University of New Hampshire. "This technological achievement, combined with the tremendous historical significance of our discoveries, made this one of the most rewarding missions I have ever participated in."

Iron Bottom Sound, situated between Guadalcanal, Savo, and Nggela Islands, was the site of five major naval battles between August and December 1942. More than 111 vessels and 1,450 aircraft were lost during the campaign, with over 20,000 lives lost. Dozens of wrecks still remain undiscovered.

"NOAA Ocean Exploration is dedicated to increasing our understanding of the deep ocean through scientific discovery, technological advancements, and data delivery," said Captain William Mowitt, NOAA Corps, acting director of NOAA Ocean Exploration. "This expedition highlights the importance of such cutting-edge technologies and the strong partnership

component of the Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute in not only making discoveries that advance science and resource management, but also engaging and educating the public on the wonders of what lies in our ocean depths.”

The expedition streamed over 138 hours of ROV dives live via NautilusLive.org, bringing real-time exploration to millions of viewers worldwide, including veterans, descendants, and historians. Using telepresence technology, more than 130 experts from the United States, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and other nations contributed remote analysis and historical interpretation during operations.

“This expedition was a great opportunity to remember the valor and sacrifices of sailors who fought with extreme tenacity and skill, on both sides. Sailors don’t start wars, but they do what their governments ask, and in the waters of Iron Bottom Sound, they did their duty to the fullest. Yet, the end result of that terrible war brought not only freedom for the United States and Allies, but for Japan as well,” said Samuel J. Cox, Director, Naval History and Heritage Command, U.S. Navy Rear Admiral (retired). “This survey of the ships of the United States, Australia, and Japan will add immeasurably to the understanding of one of the most costly naval campaigns in history, a campaign that hopefully will never be repeated.”

“As we commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States Navy, it is altogether fitting that we explore the wrecks of Iron Bottom Sound,” said Frank Thompson, Director of the Naval History and Heritage Command’s Collection Management Division, who represented the Navy aboard E/V Nautilus. “The battles in these waters cost the United States Navy dearly. Those that made the ultimate sacrifice for their country may lay far from home, but they are not, and never will be, forgotten”

This effort was made possible through collaboration with numerous organizations, including Ocean Exploration Trust;

NOAA Ocean Exploration; U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command; the Solomon Islands government; the University of New Hampshire Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping; University of Rhode Island; Solomon Islands National Museum; Kyoto University; Tokai University; the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency; Air/Sea Heritage Foundation; Major Projects Foundation; and the Royal Australian Navy Sea Power Centre.

The Government of the Solomon Islands issued the marine research permit through its Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development.

“The vast majority of our ocean lies in very deep waters that we know virtually nothing about,” said Dr. Daniel Wagner, Chief Scientist, OET. “These deep-sea explorations highlight how many extraordinary things are still hidden and waiting to be found in the great depths of our ocean.”

For imagery, video, and more information on the expedition, visit: www.NautilusLive.org