The Green Dragon

Jan Messersmith

Tying up at the buoy near Wongat Island on a bright-shining day of yellow sun and verdant tropical shades, one might pause to imagine that day when a huge blazing war machine screamed from the sky to smash itself against the sea. Best not to dwell too long on that disturbing vision. Best not to imagine the terror of the crew.

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Check your bearings before descending the buoy chain. The bomber is only a few metres away, but the visibility is seldom sufficient to see it immediately. When you near the bottom at about six metres, begin to fin south down the slope of the reef. Your first glimpse of the *Green Dragon* will likely be the massive barrel sponge at the tip of the upward-slanting port wing. If you do not see it within about twenty metres, you might want to return to the buoy chain to try a slightly different angle.

Stop to examine the oversize barrel sponge. It seems a miracle that its weight has not collapsed the crash-weakened and corrosion-damaged wing. As you fin down the upper surface of the wing, you will enjoy a busy garden of sea life that seems idyllic. Peaceful thoughts are interrupted again by the jarring sight of the gaping wound where the port engine was wrenched from the wing as the pilots manhandled their fiery dragon into the sea.

Following the wing to the fuselage, one can generally get a feel for the size of the plane. On rare days one can see from the nose to the tail. Frequently, however, the visibility does not allow such a spectacle. Swing around to the nose and you will spot the remains of the "Quad Fifty" guns. Some models of the B-25 were equipped with as many as twenty fifty calibre M-2 machine guns. On the starboard side of the nose,

Left: An oversize barrel sponge perches on the tip of the port wing. Above: The B-25 Mitchell. Above far left: Yellowtail Fusiliers.

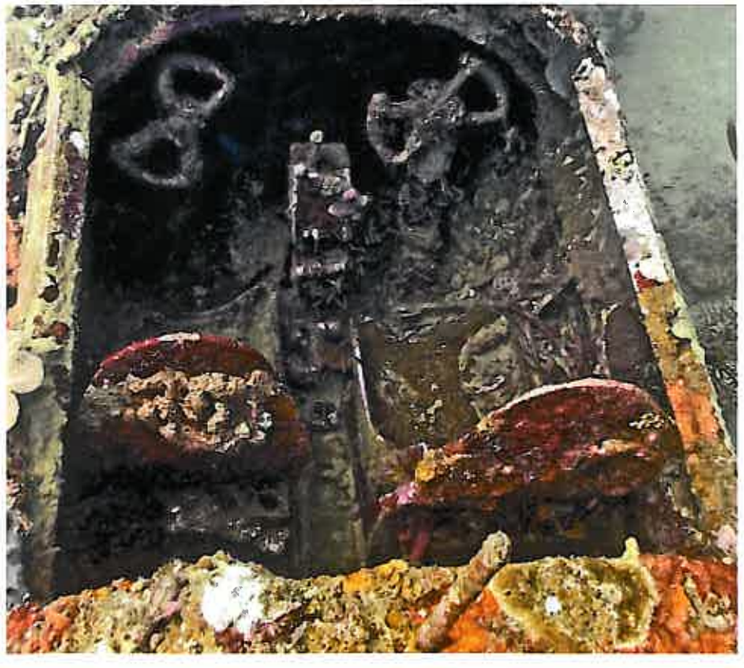
you will find ammunition feed boxes containing intact fifty calibre cartridges. If your fingers start feeling sticky at this point, please remember that if only one diver took one cartridge each time the plane is dived, the remaining cartridges would probably vanish forever within a year.

Drift back to the cockpit where you will see the pilots' seats and control yokes. The area is usually full of small fish – you may have to scare them away to see detail inside the cockpit. If you are lucky, you may find Candy-cane Cleaner Shrimp under and behind the seats. There is not much left to be damaged in the cockpit so, if someone has a camera, you may as well wriggle down into a seat for a photograph. It's a tight fit with a BC and tank, so be careful. Examine the remaining Perspex that once covered the cockpit. If you twist your head around so that you are looking up through it and gently brush away the encrustation on both sides, you can see that it is still perfectly clear after sixty-four years.

Leaving the cockpit, look down and

you will see the starboard engine. It is partially broken away from the nacelle, and two of the propellers are embedded in the sand, but it is in remarkably good condition otherwise. If you peer into the front of the cowling, you can still see the cooling fins on the cylinders. Move around to the aft end of the nacelle, and look underneath it — you will find the

Above right: Fifty calibre cartridges can be found in the ammunition feed boxes that served the "Quad Fifty" in the nose and the "Twin Fifty" in the top turret. Below: Once covered by Perspex, the cockpit lies empty and forlorn.



About the *Green Dragon*

The B-25 "Mitchell" bomber Green Dragon (pictured opposite), of the United States Army's 405th Bombardment Squadron, was severely damaged by ground fire in August 1943 while on a mission to destroy Japanese shipping near Madang. The crew successfully ditched the aircraft losing only the port engine in the process – a remarkable feat. Five surviving crew members swam to Wongat Island. Sadly, all except one met gruesome fates. The lone survivor outlived the war as a prisoner in Tokyo.

North American Aviation built the first of 9,984 B-25 medium bombers in 1940. The B-25 was named after General Billy Mitchell, a maverick pilot who antagonized the military establishment by insisting that bombers could be effective against enemy shipping. He also advocated the formation of a "United States Air Force" independent of the United States Army. He was eventually court-martialled for thinking too far ahead. They called it insubordination.

The B-25 saw action around the world for four decades. Indonesia was the last country to use them in active service. They were retired from duty there in 1979. They won fame for the first bombing of the Japanese mainland in April 1942, when B-25s from the *USS Hornet* aircraft carrier flew 650 miles to bomb Tokyo. No one could have believed, when Pearl Harbour was attacked, that Tokyo residents would be ducking for cover in a mere four and a half months. The versatility of the Mitchell made it possible.

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Above: The top turret "Twin Fifty" is in excellent condition considering the obvious bashing it received. Top left: The port vertical stabilizer; fabric covering the rudder surfaces has long vanished. Pascal Michon practices extreme Tai Chi in the background. Left: The Ribbon Eel transforms from black as a juvenile to iridescent blue as an adult. Bottom left: Front view of the one remaining engine on the starboard wing.

starboard landing gear sporting a giant tyre. The starboard wing continues down the slope to about 24 meters.

Coming back up the starboard wing to the fuselage you will see the "Twin Fifty" machine gun turret. The Perspex dome is mostly intact, but it has some horrifying battle damage. There is a hole in the port side as big as a fist and a huge dent also. The Browning M-2 machine guns are in good condition and more ammunition remains inside the feed canisters under the guns. While on top of the fuselage, notice the two radio antennas protruding from the skin.

Moving aft, you will observe the horizontal stabilizer and the two huge vertical stabilizers — prominent features of the silhouette of the B-25. Again, one marvels at the skill and luck of the pilots. Few aircraft survive ditching at sea with so little damage. The fabric skins of the control surfaces of the empennage have long since rotted, leaving a skeleton of aluminium bones that is at once elegant and creepy. Behind the horizontal stabilizer at the very end of the fuselage, you will find the thirty calibre 'stinger' machine gun. Compared to the huge 'fifties' elsewhere, it doesn't look very scary. As is the case on many other parts of the aircraft, it is surprising to find shiny, like-new metal at the end of the barrel of the machine gun.

On the way back up the side of the fuselage to the port wing, notice the square hole. There is another like it on the opposite side. You can look straight through the fuselage. These holes are in the same position as the 'waist guns' that were fitted to some models of the B-25. If you have a torch, carefully stick your head through the hole and have a look around. (Your buddy is watching out for you, of course.) Again, if a camera is handy, a shot of a diver through the holes is always amusing. When approaching the port wing from aft, have a look at the side of the fuselage near the bottom. There is a big crack in it. If it happened on ditching, then it is amazing that the fuselage held together.

If you are careful, you can swim under the port wing near the fuselage. As you are approaching, look carefully on the bottom and you may see a Ribbon Eel. It will be sticking out of its hidey-

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hole by about eight or ten centimetres. Its colour will depend on its age. A juvenile is coal black with a bright yellow stripe down its back. Adults keep the stripe, but the body transforms to a stunning iridescent blue. They have two improbably large appendages on their snouts that look strangely like tennis racquets. If you don't find a Ribbon Eel under the wing, move around the fuselage and wings again, looking underneath. Several divers have reported spotting them in other locations.

As you make your way up underneath the port wing, you are likely to see a group of Yellowtail Fusiliers. We have also seen a large magnificent Leopard Coral Grouper there regularly. It is amusing how many of the fish seem to hold to the theory that 'up' is the opposite direction to whatever seems to be the 'bottom'. Many small fish, and some bigger ones, can be seen hovering upside-down near the underside of the wing. You will be amused, upon rising to the level of the giant barrel sponge, to see the air bubbles that you released while under the wing now rising up from the inside of the bowl as if it were a huge cauldron of steaming fish soup.

The port wing points more or less in the direction of the buoy. If you fin in that direction, you should find the chain. While coming up from the bomber, keep a sharp eye out on the reef. Though it is not the greatest reef around, it does abound with big, juicy nudibranch. (Just kidding — don't eat them!)

If you are in Madang for diving, there are a handful of 'must-do' sites. The *Green Dragon* has to be near the top. ■

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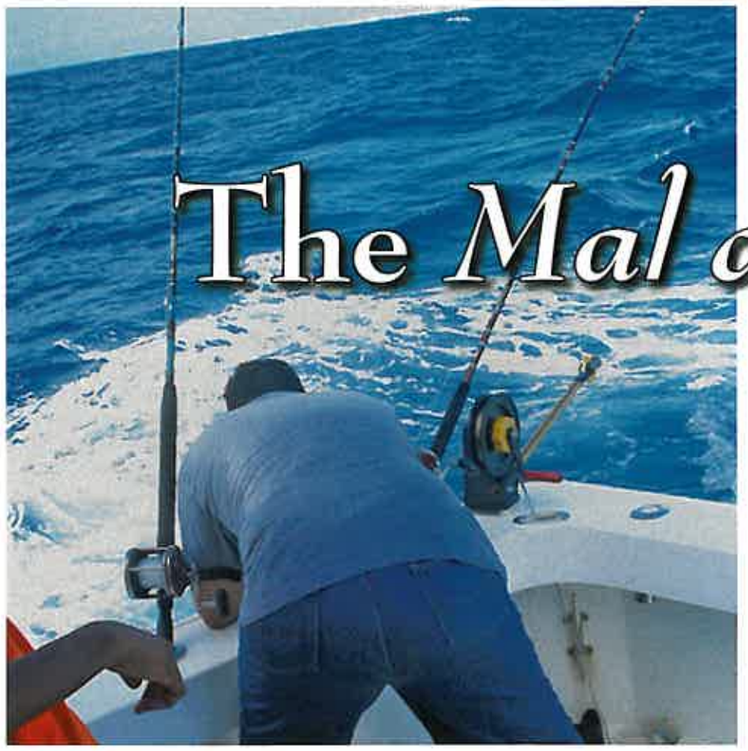
Above: Cirrhitichthys falco. *Dwarf Hawkfish abound on the Bomber – 'adorable' is probably a good adjective to describe them.*

The *Green Dragon* Dive Site

The Green Dragon is a dive site located in Madang in the channel to the south of Wongat Island (below).



The *Mal de Mer*

Teresa Lyons

Seasickness is not just for the 'young and weak' - it is a debilitating ailment that can affect even the most hardened of deckies. If you have ever come down with it then you'd probably agree that you never want to go through such a miserable experience ever again. If so, read on for tips on what causes it, and how to avoid it.

With half the nation spending at least a few hours on a boat every weekend, it's almost laughable that so many of us have no idea what causes seasickness.

After asking around a bit, I was horrified (but not surprised) to discover that there seems to be a ridiculous number of highly educated men in Papua New Guinea who firmly believe it to be a sign of weakness and therefore should only rightly affect women and children… Rubbish!

Left: Try to prepare ahead of time to avoid feeling sick as a dog instead of enjoying yourself. Above: In rough weather, seasickness can bring anyone from the inexperienced to the die-hard fisherman to their knees.

Seasickness has nothing to do the shape of your genitalia or whether or not your voice has broken. It is caused by a mix-up of messages between the inner ear (the bit that helps you keep your balance) and what the eyes are telling the brain. So next time your hubby or dad yells down at you from the flybridge with inanely thick comments like, "Oi! It's not time to start the burley yet, we're not even at the FAD!" or "See, women shouldn't be allowed on boats," just remember who's the real dummy.

Seasickness has been well documented for thousands of years, even as far back to the ancient time of my Polynesian ancestors who travelled the Pacific in their dugout canoes, migrating from island to island in search for a new home with nothing but the stars to guide them. French explorers spoke of it in their writings, calling it the 'mal de mer', or sickness of the sea. It seems, however, that for all of our technologies and vast developments, 21st century man still finds himself at the mercy of seasickness when he least expects it – and if he's anything like my supremely better half, will very often pretend it's just a hangover (although I must admit, I am guilty of using this excuse in the past).