

Salvage of the *Mauna Loa*

It is perhaps with some irony that the salvage rights to the *Mauna Loa* and other wrecks were sold to the Fujita Salvage Company from Japan. Between 1959 and 1961 Japanese dive salvage teams fought strong currents and low visibility in Darwin Harbour to salvage much of the *Mauna Loa*, *Meigs*, *Zealandia*, *Kelat*, *Neptune* and *USS Peary*. The upper portion of the hulls and much of the superstructure was raised and transported to Japan for scrap. Just prior to this the *British Motorist* wreck was raised, reconstructed and used as a storage and base for living quarters for the duration of the salvage operation.



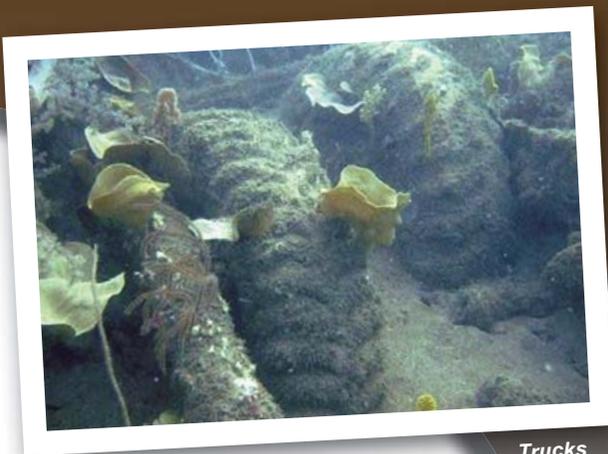
Engine Room bricks

The *Mauna Loa* today

The wreckage is orientated North-South, in approximately 18 metres of water depth. The seabed is silty and easily disturbed by divers and tides. As is typical of Darwin Harbour the visibility is very much dependent on the weather, tides and currents. Even on a well planned day, visibility rarely exceeds two to three metres. The GPS co-ordinates of the site are 12°29.815S / 130°49.162E.

The upper portion of the hull and superstructure have been cut away, exposing the bottom of the hull and ribs. The remnants of some of the cargo, including motorcycles, vehicles and ammunition may also be seen.

Large uprights in the middle of the site appear to be the remains of mast bases and portions of support beams, and funnels and crane derricks may also be seen here. There are many cut off beams and twisted portions of large metal off cuts strewn around the site. Some bricks from the engine room, ladder sections and the remains of bulkheads can be found amidships (towards the centre of the wreck).



Trucks

Protection and access

The wreck is a protected historic shipwreck under the *Heritage Conservation Act*. Divers may access this site, but must remember that it is illegal to damage, interfere with or remove any of the structural remains or movable objects. Please maintain the "look but don't touch" policy. Fishing is also permitted.

Contact

For further information on the heritage, conservation and management of the site, contact:

Heritage Branch

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Phone: (08) 8999 5532

www.nt.gov.au/heritage

Front cover image

Mauna Loa

Courtesy Australian War Memorial

All other images, side scan image and scale diorama

Courtesy Tek Ventures Diving Services

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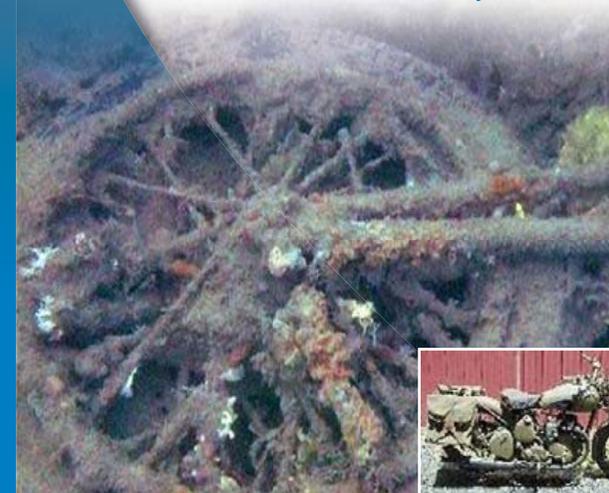
NORTHERN TERRITORY
SHIPWRECKS



U.S.A.T. *Mauna Loa*

1919–1942

Sunk during the first air raid
Darwin Harbour 19 February 1942



A collaborative product of the Heritage Branch
and Tek Ventures Diving Services

The *Mauna Loa* was a World War II cargo vessel sunk during the first Japanese raid on Darwin in 1942. Although much has deteriorated by time, salvage and tide, the exposed cargo holds reveal a rare display of the remains of equipment, vehicles and ammunition from the World War II era.

Construction and working life

Mauna Loa was built in 1919 by Los Angeles Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company in San Pedro and was initially named *SS West Conob*. Registered dimensions were 410 x 54.4 x 27.2 feet. Her registered gross tonnage was 5436 tons. Constructed of steel and powered by an oil-fuelled triple expansion engine, she had a straight stem, counter stern, two decks, two masts and water ballast tanks.

By 1921 the ship had circumnavigated the globe twice, sailing for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. In 1925 she began sailing to South America, then to Australia and New Zealand. In 1928 she was sold and her name changed to *Golden Eagle*. In 1934 she was taken over by the Matson Line and renamed *Mauna Loa*.



HMAS Swan and the Mauna Loa in Darwin Harbour, 1942
Courtesy Australian War Memorial. 042997

Mauna Loa - World War II

The *Mauna Loa* was chartered by the War Department in November 1941 to carry supplies from San Francisco to the American garrison in the Philippines.

On 7 December 1941 America was suddenly brought into World War II when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Following this air attack, the Japanese were intent on severing all possible strategic supply lines to Asia and the Pacific.

Hong Kong, Burma, Thailand, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies and the islands around New Britain fell to the Japanese within weeks. In January, following the invasion of the Phillipines, the *Mauna Loa* returned to Australia.

On 15 February 1942, the *Mauna Loa* was re-loaded with armaments and troops. She joined three other merchant ships and an escort of four warships bound for Timor in an attempt to deliver supplies and reinforce troops. The Japanese soon pinpointed the convoy's position. The *Houston's* gunnery action on the Japanese was enough to prevent all but one hit on the *Mauna Loa*. Two men



.303 rifle ammunition

were wounded and one later died. Timor was captured by the Japanese so the mission was aborted. The convoy arrived back in Darwin on 17 February 1942, straining port facilities with this unexpected return.

Just before 10 o'clock on 19 February 1942, 188 Japanese aircraft attacked Darwin for the first time.

This was the same Japanese fleet which had attacked Pearl Harbor some 10 weeks earlier.

The result of the first raid left 243 people reported dead, eight ships sunk, ships beached, on fire or severely damaged. Buildings and installations were destroyed. An invasion of Australia was thought by many to be imminent.

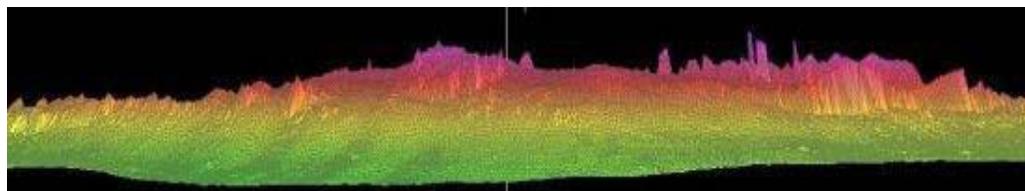
The *Mauna Loa* is reported to have sunk after being hit by two bombs that went through an open cargo hatch.

Historians report five men were killed and several more wounded.

This was the largest and most devastating Darwin raid. There were to be more than 60 raids on Darwin, with the last in November 1943.

Key points of interest

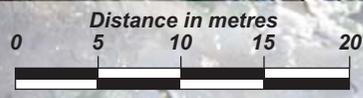
1. Remains of trucks
2. Engine room bricks
3. BSA motorbikes
4. Bren gun carriers
5. Ammunition
6. Exposed deck plating
7. Sand patches



Stern

Side sonar image of site

Bow (South)



Plan view of the 1:70 scale diorama