

Normandy Wreck Week

16th September

Well the plan was to dive the Empire Broadsword, sunk by a mine, 140m long, gun turrets, area of fishing line and netting to be avoided, and a strict request not to enter the wreck. Long 45 minute stream out to site, just off Omaha beach, where you could see the white crosses on the hill of soldiers in the American cemetery. However, the wreck site was already populated by a boat with a group of spear fishermen, going for big bass we were informed. We were asked to go to another site, and we did. All really disappointed but we hoped to do it later in the week. Another 20 minute steam back to the east, to the Pontoon at Omaha, lying in 27-30m water. Now this has been a long steam. And we have a 45 minute dive to come followed by another long steam. There is no other solution, break out the She-Wee. Now I would have thought the diving world was familiar with the revolution that is the She-Wee. No more baring of buttocks over the side of dive ribs, precarious balancing and endless potential for a soggy disaster. No, we now have a means of extending the water flow past our clothing, with buttock dignity intact. Who would not be happy with that? Well as it turns out, one French dive operator, 3 Irishmen and one of our own, an ex-para who accused me of having man envy and appeared genuinely horrified. Oh how I larfed! And five minutes later, relief was mine. However, I had forgotten to bring my She-Wee so I had to borrow Dawn's. Hmmmmm, yep, I can see that sharing a She-Wee might be a bit of an odd one.

On the Pontoon, the viz was not bad, a usable 4m maybe, bit murky but fine. My view of diving this area so far is that it is like the Solent but the lights have been turned on, maybe weak and unreliable bulbs at times, but the lights are definitely on. For the biologists, huge shoals of *Trisopterus luscus*, and the sponges, *Cliona celata*, *Raspailia ramosa*, *Haliclona*, *Polymastia*



Raspailia ramosa (sponge)



Cliona celata (sponge)



Bispira volutacornis (worm)

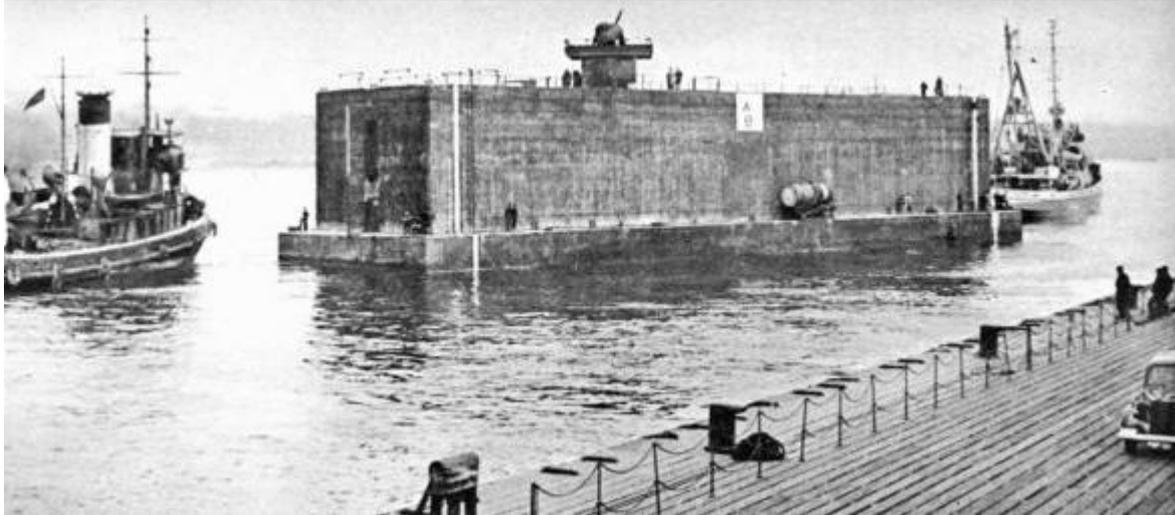


Aplidium elegans (colonial ascidian)

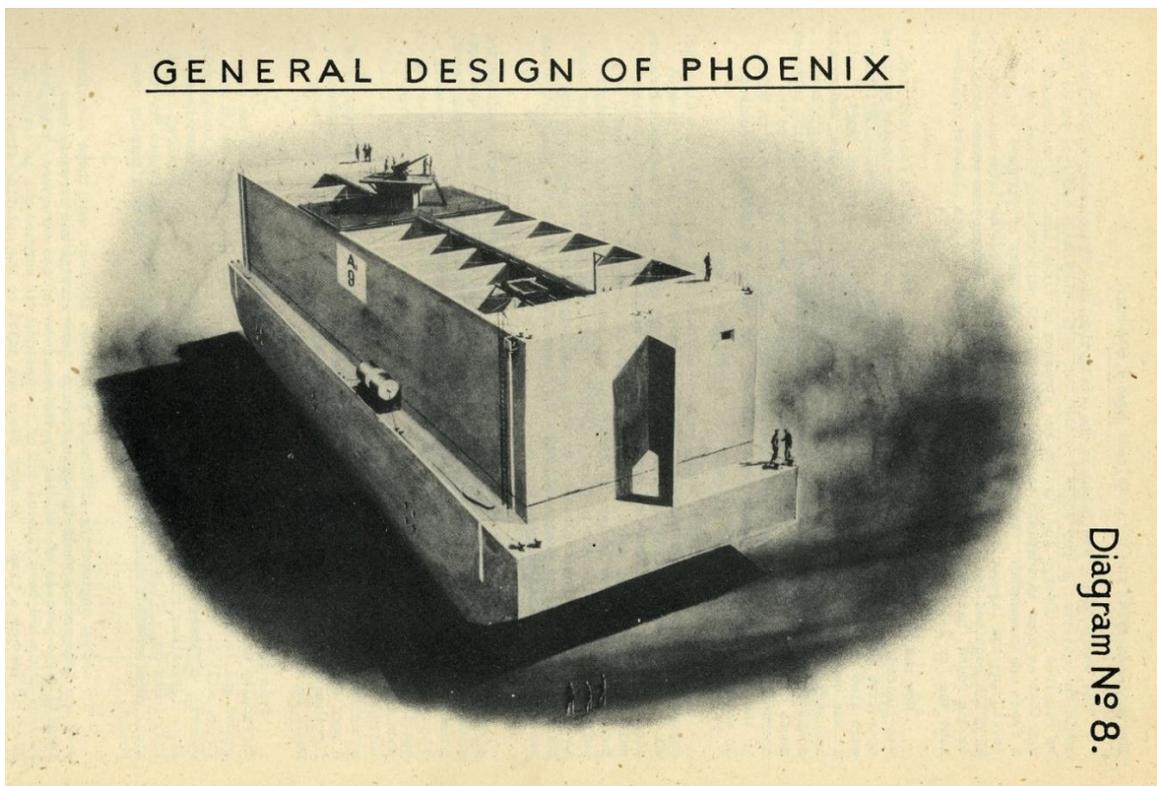
mamillaris, *Hemimyscale columella*, lobsters, patches of *Flustra* and *Nemertesia antennina*, and the sea squirts *Ciona intestinalis*, *Aplidium elegans*, and *Ascidia virginea*. Some areas with walls of anemones, *Actinothoe sphyrodeta*.

The Deep Mulberry Component. A Phoenix A caisson which was lost while being towed towards Omaha beach for positioning in Mulberry "A" harbour.

Name	A Mulberry Phoenix A1 Caisson
Description	A Phoenix A. This caisson, a component of a Mulberry harbour failed to make it to the Mulberry A harbour on Omaha beach and sunk well off the beach in about 28m. Has a mounting for a gun and live and fired ammunition is present



A Phoenix Caisson being manoeuvred by tugs



A drawing from 'The Story of the Mulberries' published by the War Office in April 1947.

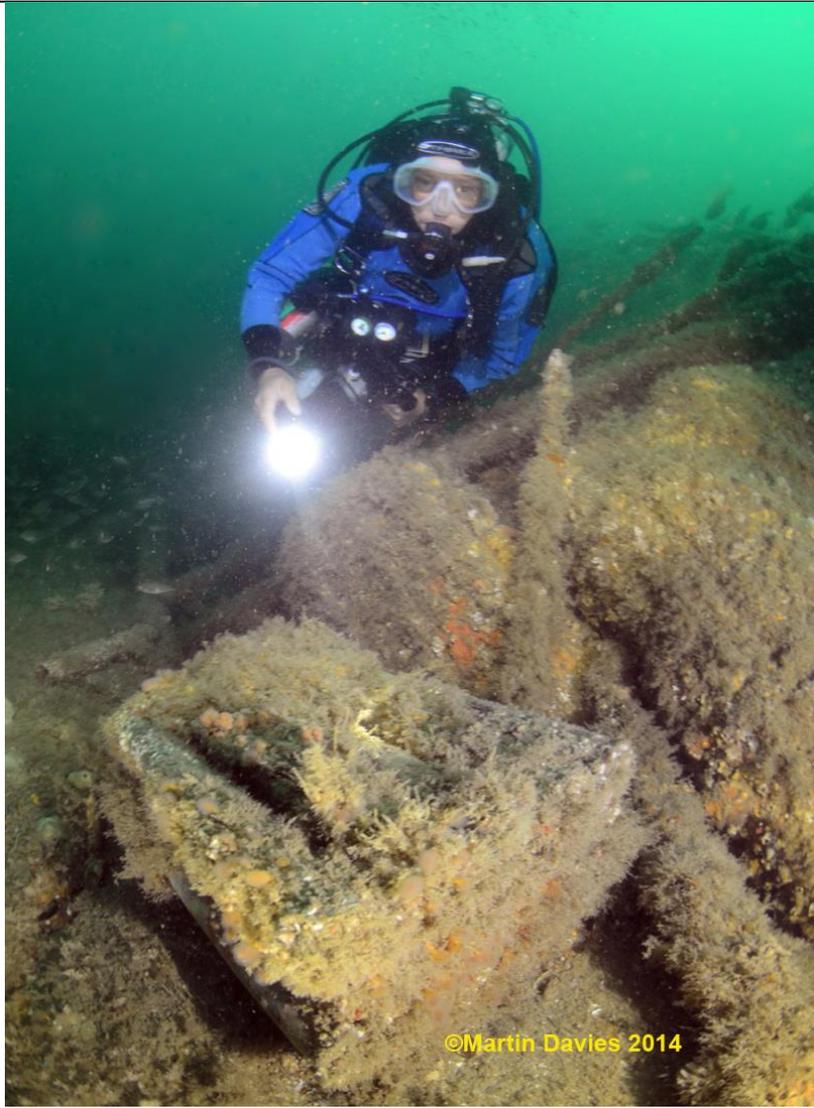
Note the gun platform

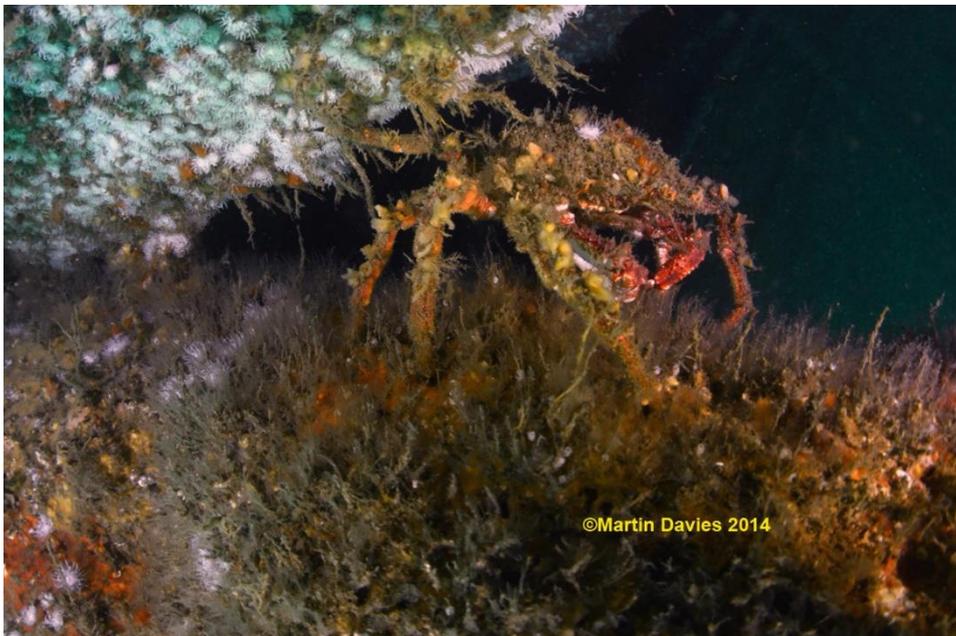
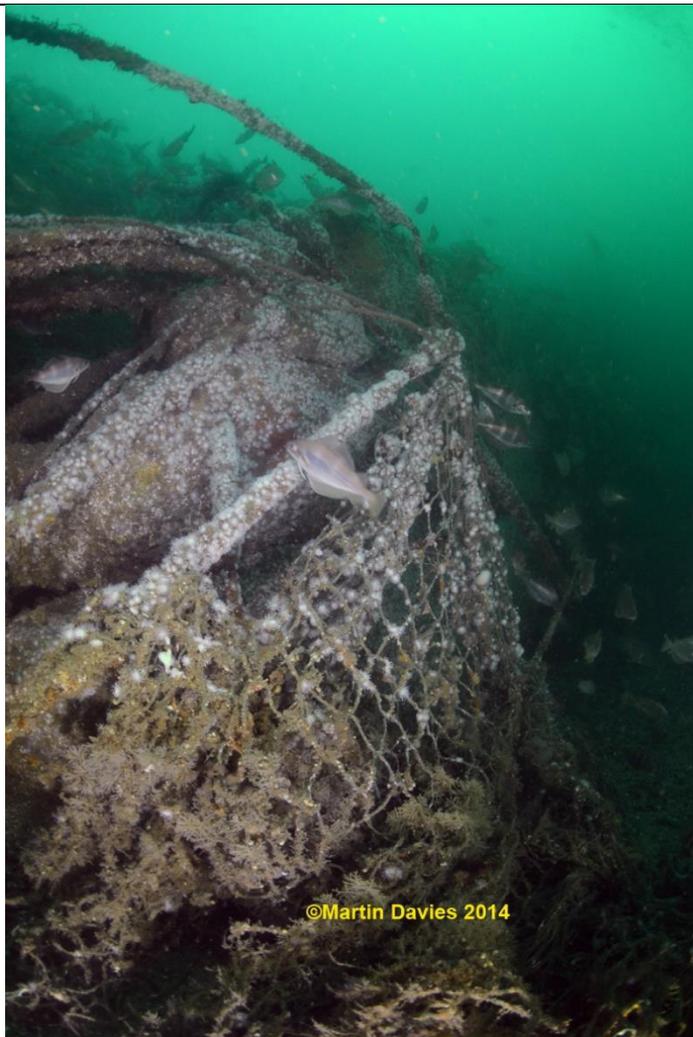


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Length	60m	
Beam	15m	Height: 18m
Tonnage	6000 approx	
Approx Depth	27m	

Bit of a bouncy steam back to shore for the dive interval. I was wondering if the afternoon dive would go ahead, as it seemed a bit lively, and the sight of the dive head honcho Lionel and his trusty henchman Pierre, approaching the top of the beach, giving it knowledgeable looks, confirmed my suspicions. Verdict, dive the "Block Phoenix", which turned out to be a series of Mulberries, forming a chain which you could cross at the intersection of each unit. The plan was to moor on the leeward side of the wreckage, dive along the inside of the mulberry, going through to the outside of the units only if confident of your navigational abilities, to bring you back to the leeward side. Bounced our way out there for 10 minutes and everyone got in. Myself and Dawn were one of the last, got down to 11m, and saw nothing. Thick murk. Ahhh now this looks more like the Solent! Personally I got out of this type of diving about 8 or so years ago, so that was enough for me. Not wasting my time. Tried to get up quickly so could get Dawn down with the last pair if she wanted to go but was thwarted by the Suunto 3 minute stop, so everyone had gone by the time we got back. Turned out she was not fussed either. Not long before others popped up and short dive times were had by most pairs, with the intrepid Martin and Ali being one of the dive pairs that stayed in the soup, but they love dives like that...no accounting for taste! Some apparently enjoyed it?

The Arromanche Mulberry.

Description	<p>Mulberry "B"</p> <p>Mulberry "B" was the harbour assembled on Gold Beach at Arromanches for use by the British and Canadian invasion forces. It was finally decommissioned 6 months after D-Day as allied forces were able to use the recently captured port of Antwerp to offload troops and supplies.</p> <p>Golden Arrow</p> <p>"Arrow" was the code name for the port at Arromanches and "Golden" was a reference to the Gold Beach sector. The facility was also known as Port Winston.</p> <p>Bombardon</p> <p>Large floating breakwaters fabricated in steel that were anchored outside the main breakwaters that consisted of Gooseberries (block ships) and Phoenix (concrete caissons). During the bad storms at the end of June 1944 some Bombardons sank while others broke loose, possibly causing more damage to the harbours than the storm itself. The design of the Bombardons was the responsibility of the Royal Navy while the Royal Engineers were responsible for the design of the rest of the Mulberry harbour equipment.</p> <p>Phoenix</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Reinforced concrete caissons constructed by civil engineering contractors around the coast of Britain, collected and sunk at Dungeness, the Cant and Pagham. The engineers were unable to oat the Phoenixes and US Navy Captain (later Rear Admiral) Edward Ellsberg, already well known for quickly refloating scuttled ships at Massawa and Oran, was brought in to accomplish the task, though not without obtaining Churchill's intervention in taking the task away from the Royal Engineers and giving it to the Royal Navy. The Phoenixes, once refloated, were towed across the channel to form the "Mulberry" harbour breakwaters together with the "Gooseberry" block ships. Ellsberg rode one of the concrete caissons to Normandy; once there he helped unsnarl wrecked landing craft and vehicles on the beach.</p> </div> </div> <p>Phoenix construction, Weymouth 1944</p>
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Whale



A Whale floating roadway leading to a Spud pier at Mulberry A off Omaha Beach

The dock piers were code named "Whale". These piers were the floating roadways that connected the "Spud" pier heads to the land. Designed by Allan Beckett the roadways were made from innovative torsionally flexible bridging units that had a span of 80 ft., mounted on pontoon units of either steel or concrete called "Beetles". After the war many of the "Whale" bridge spans from Arromanches were used to repair

bombed bridges in France, Belgium and Holland. Such units are still visible as a bridge over the Meuse River in Vacherauville (Meuse), as a bridge over the Moselle River on road D56 between Cattenom and Kœnigsmacker (Moselle) and in Vierville-sur-Mer (Calvados) along road D517.

Spud Piers

The pier heads or landing wharves at which ships were unloaded. Each of these consisted of a pontoon with four legs that rested on the sea bed to anchor the pontoon, yet allowed it to float up and down freely with the tide.

Beetle

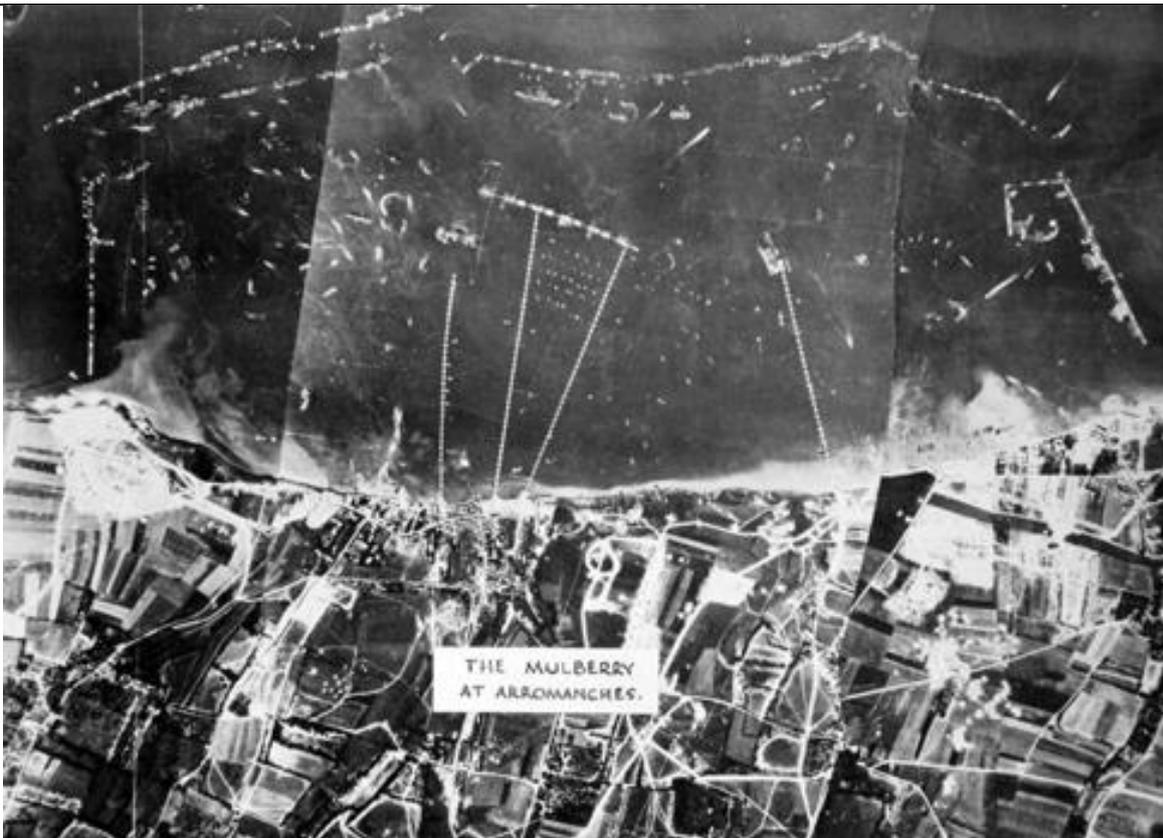


The remains of the harbour off Arromanches

Beetles were pontoons that supported the "Whale" piers. They were moored in position using wires attached to "Kite" anchors which were also designed by Allan Beckett. These anchors had such high holding power that very few could be recovered at the end of the War. The Navy was dismissive of Beckett's claims for his anchor's holding ability so Kite

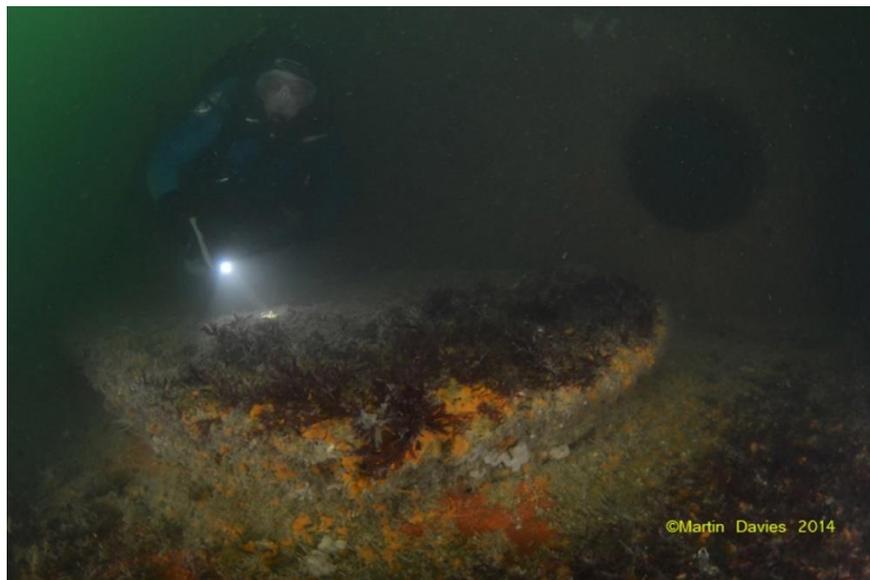
anchors were not used for mooring the Bombardons. The only known surviving Kite anchor is displayed in a private museum at Vierville-sur-Mer although a full size replica forms part of a memorial to Beckett in Arromanches.

The text above and pictures above were taken from Wikipedia:
Wikipedia contributors, "Mulberry harbour," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*,
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mulberry_harbour&oldid=643126049
(accessed January 25, 2015).



A photo mosaic from 1944 showing an overview of Mulberry B as it was when in service.







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Approx
Depth

15m

Previous Day

Next Day