

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Truk Lagoon Underwater Fleet, Truk Atoll

and or common Truk Lagoon, Truk State, Federated States of Micronesia

2. Location

street & number

not for publication

city, town

vicinity of

Federated States of

state Micronesia

code 75

county

Truk State

code 050

3. Classification

Category

district

building(s)

structure

site

object

Ownership

public

private

both

Public Acquisition

in process

being considered

Status

occupied

unoccupied

work in progress

Accessible

yes: restricted

yes: unrestricted

no

Present Use

agriculture

commercial

educational

entertainment

government

industrial

military

museum

park

private residence

religious

scientific

transportation

other:

4. Owner of Property

name Government of the Federated States of Micronesia

street & number

city, town Kolonia

vicinity of

state

Ponape, Eastern
Caroline Islands

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.

Government of the Federated States of Micronesia

street & number

city, town Kolonia, Ponape, Federated States of Micronesia

state

Ponape, Eastern
Caroline Islands

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Truk Lagoon Underwater Fleet

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date September 30, 1976

federal state county local

depository for survey records

National Register of Historic Places

city, town Washington

state

D.C.

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Truk Atoll is centered in the sprawling Caroline Islands (the Federated States of Micronesia) in the western Pacific, eight degrees north of the equator. The atoll is the remnant of a large volcano, now mostly submerged. The islands are surrounded by a coral reef 40 miles in diameter and 140 miles in circumference, and having five passes to the sea. Inside the reef are countless, flat coral islands and several, larger volcanic islands. Of the latter, those of strategic value to the Japanese were: Dublon, Moen, Fefan, Eten, Uman, Param, and Tol. Moen is the capital of Truk, which is a state in the Federated States of Micronesia. Truk Lagoon is one of the best natural anchorages in the world.

In 1939, the Japanese Imperial Navy organized the Fourth Fleet with its headquarters, along with the Fourth Base Force, at Truk. From 1942 to February 1944, the Japanese Combined Fleet operated out of Truk. Alerted on February 4 to the probability of an American attack, the Japanese removed the greater portion of their naval ships from Truk to havens farther west. On February 17 and 18, and again on April 30, 1944, American carrier aircraft carried out massive raids on Truk. On the eve of the first air raid, there remained in the lagoon some thirty-nine ships, including three light cruisers, three destroyers, a seaplane tender, and a submarine tender. The remaining thirty-one vessels included freighters, tankers, tugs, and patrol boats. Numerous small craft, such as landing craft and barges, were also present.

Most of the larger warships escaped from the lagoon at the beginning of the attack, but American ships and planes destroyed many of these in the deep waters of the Pacific outside the reef. None of these has been found. Inside the lagoon, principally at two anchorages, nearly all vessels were sunk. They

1. These major islands had the following installations:

Dublon--docks, seaplane base, submarine base, naval headquarters, a 2,500-ton floating drydock, torpedo storage, torpedo boat base, hospital, and coastal and antiaircraft guns.

Moen--bomber field, seaplane and fighter base, torpedo storage, torpedo boat base, radio communications center, and coastal and antiaircraft batteries.

Fefan--supply center, piers, warehouses, ammunition dumps, and dual-purpose guns.

Eten--airstrip.

Uman--airstrip and coastal and antiaircraft defenses.

Param--airstrip and coastal and antiaircraft defenses.

Tol--torpedo boat base and coastal and antiaircraft defenses.

2. The number of Japanese ships sunk inside and outside the lagoon varies from account to account, ranging from a low of 30 to a high of 60. This account relies heavily on two sources which the writer considers highly reliable, particularly with regard to statistics: United States Strategic Bombing Survey, The Reduction of Truk, vol. 77 (Naval Analysis Division, U.S. Navy, 1947), and Klaus P. Lindermann, Hailstorm Over Truk Lagoon (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1982).

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	

Specific dates 1944-1945

Builder Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Truk Lagoon is one of the best anchorages in the world. It was an excellent and formidable Japanese advanced naval base, if not as heavily defended as Allied forces presumed. From July 1942 to February 1944, Japan's Combined Fleet operated out of Truk, extending its power into the Southeast and Southern Pacific. The threat of an American attack in early February 1944 caused the Combined Fleet to withdraw from Truk, on February 10, never to return. The U.S. Navy's carrier strike on February 17 and 18, 1944, coordinated with an assault on Enewetak Atoll in the Marshall Islands, seriously impaired Truk's air force, destroyed virtually all Japanese shipping in the lagoon, and heavily damaged land installations. Truk was now virtually defenseless and the United States decided an invasion was unnecessary. The successful attack allowed plans to be made to bypass Truk and to strike at Japan's inner defenses in the Marianas. The legend of Truk's invulnerability had been destroyed. American carrier strikes had matured into a fierce force; and a pattern had been set for future Pacific carrier attacks.

The Japanese at Truk, 1940-1944

Japan's Fourth Fleet was organized in 1939, its mission being the protection of the mandated islands of Micronesia. Headquartered at Truk in 1940, the Fourth Fleet established naval base forces in the Carolines, Marianas, and Marshalls. When Japan captured Wake Island in 1942, the Fourth Fleet established a base force there. At Truk, seaplane bases were developed on Dublon and Moen islands; land plane fields were constructed on Moen, Eten, and Param; and naval facilities were established on Dublon and other islands to replenish the fleet at anchor. No major docking or drydocking facilities were constructed, thus Truk was ¹ not the Japanese Pearl Harbor that American intelligence presumed it was. Supplies, petroleum products, and ammunition were lightered from Dublon to ships anchored in the lagoon.

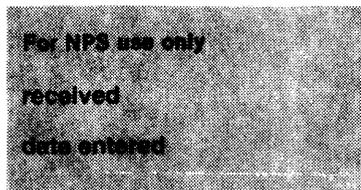
In August 1942, Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto, commander in chief of the Combined Fleet (First, Second, and Third Fleets and the Sixth Submarine Fleet) arrived at Truk, maintaining his headquarters on board the giant battleship, Yamato.² When Admiral Yamamoto's plane was shot down near Rabaul on April 18, 1943,

1. The Japanese had a 2,500-ton floating drydock at Truk. It was capable of taking vessels up to the size of a destroyer.

2. Yamato and her sister ship, Musashi, were armed with the world's largest naval guns, 18.1 inches in diameter. Yamato was so large, it was called the Yamato Hotel. See Hiroyuki Agawa, The Reluctant Admiral (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979), p. 326.

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comprise the "underwater fleet," the Mecca of divers worldwide. A summary of the sunken vessels and other wrecks within the lagoon follows:

Combined Fleet Repair Anchorage

This anchorage was between Dublon and Fefan islands:

1. Yamagiri Maru. Six-hold freighter, 3,188 tons, 305 feet long. Its hold no. 5 contains 18.1-inch shells for Japan's two giant battleships, Yamato and Musashi.

2. Tonan Maru 3. Tanker, 19,209 tons, 535 feet long. This large whale factory converted to a tanker was hit by an American submarine in 1943. She was towed to Truk for repairs. Tonan was sunk in shallow water on February 17. After World War II, Japanese authorities received permission to salvage the ship for whaling operations, Japan's merchant marine fleet having been destroyed. Large sections of the vessel that had been blown off by bombs remain at the site.

3. Kiyozumi Maru. Six-hold freighter, 6,983 tons, 450 feet long. This vessel was taken over by the Imperial Navy in 1941 and converted to an auxiliary cruiser. In October 1943, her armament was removed and the ship was reclassified as a transport. She participated in the Midway campaign of 1942 as a troop carrier. In December 1943, an American submarine hit Kiyozumi with a torpedo. A tug towed the vessel into Truk, where repairs were being made. On February 17, she was bombed repeatedly and finally sank. Because oil still leaks from the wreck, she is known locally as "Oilslick Wreck."

4. Hoyo Maru. Large tanker, 8,629 tons, 470 feet long. Built in 1936, Hoyo was taken over by the Japanese Navy in 1940. From 1941 on, she was stationed at Truk. Hit in a bombing attack at sea in 1943, the ship was repaired in Japan. Luck was not with her. Early in February 1944, she departed Truk en route to Singapore and was hit by a submarine torpedo just outside the lagoon. She was towed in and was undergoing repairs at the time of the American attack. The ship broke in two as she capsized. The wreck is close to Fefan's shore and, because of silty water, Hoyo is seldom visited by divers.

5. Kansho Maru. Five-hold freighter, 4,861 tons, 380 feet long. The Japanese Navy employed this ship as a transport of special cargo from

3. All ship descriptions are from Lindermann, Hailstorm Over Truk.

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September 1940 on. It is considered to be one of the "finest" wrecks in Truk by divers, even though it is covered with a layer of easily disturbed sediment. The wreck contains navigation instruments, bottles, plates, and other artifacts.

6. Daikichi Maru. The physical evidence suggests that this ship was the victim of a major explosion, perhaps having had an explosive cargo. There is no positive evidence that the pieces of wreckage are from the Daikichi, but that ship has not otherwise been found in the lagoon. The largest piece of wreckage is a midship, including the engine room and a stack. Another piece nearby resembles a bow. Daikichi was a freighter, between 1,500 and 2,000 tons.

7. I-169 Submarine. I-169 was a large submarine commissioned in 1934. She could remain at sea for 45 days while traveling 14,000 miles. She participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor. Soon outdated by superior submarines, I-169 was converted to an underwater transport. She was in the lagoon when American carrier planes attacked on April 30, 1944. Orders were given to submerge. The main induction valve had been left open. The submarine quickly sank and the crew on board drowned. After the wreckage was discovered in 1973, the Japanese government arranged to have the crew's remains recovered, cremated, and returned to the homeland.

8. Heian Maru. Large cargo and passenger liner used as a submarine tender, 11,616 tons, 510 feet long. Heian is the largest ship remaining the lagoon. She had been assigned to the 6th Submarine Fleet in Kwajalein, which was captured by the United States in early February 1944. A sister ship, Hikawa Maru, converted to a hospital ship, also was at Truk. Clearly marked with red crosses, she was not attacked by American planes.

9. Harbor Tug. This vessel is in shallow water near Dublon Island. Her hull appears to be intact.

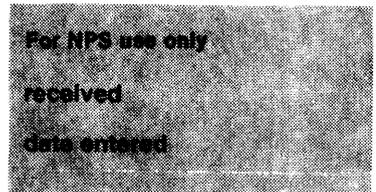
10. Fleet Tug. Large, ocean-going tug. Along with navigation equipment, there is a large coil of hemp rope.

11. Patrol Boat 34. The vessel is possibly a former destroyer, Suzuki, built in the 1920s.

12. Shinkoku Maru. Tanker, 10,020 tons, 500 feet long. Launched in 1939, Shinkoku first carried crude oil from the United States to Japan. In 1941, the Japanese Navy fitted out the ship as a fleet oiler. She was with the fleet that

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attacked Pearl Harbor. In 1942, she entered Truk for repairs after being torpedoed by an American submarine. A single torpedo sank her on February 17, 1944. The wreck contains many artifacts as well as human bones.⁴

13. Fumitsuki. Destroyer. Launched in 1926, she was undergoing repair at the Repair Anchorage. Fumitsuki was destroyed by a bomb. No trace of the wreckage has yet been found or identified.

In addition to these wrecks, an area between Dublon and Fefan islands was used by the Japanese as a dumping ground. This area is heavily silted and therefore has little coral growth. Divers have found many objects including an automobile, four-bladed ship's propeller, tracked vehicle, aircraft parts, tank trucks, generators, and engines.

Combined Fleet Anchorage

This anchorage was east and south of Dublon, around Eten, and south to Uman. The majority of the wrecks consist of vessels other than warships:

14. Nippo Maru. Freighter, 3,763 tons, 352 feet long. Prior to World War II, Nippo was a banana boat on the Taiwan-Japan run. In 1941, she became a fresh water transport for the Japanese Navy and was a frequent visitor to Truk. Discovered in 1980, the wreck has a wide variety of artifacts on board: coastal defense guns, field artillery, trucks, shells, and a tank.

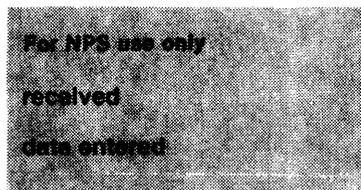
15. Momokawa Maru. Five-hold feighter, 3,829 tons, 352 feet long. Launched in 1940 as a timber transport, Siberia-Japan, Momokawa was sunk in the February 17-18 attack. The wreck was not discovered until 1982. Many artifacts are on board, including porcelain dishes, chinaware, ship's bell, aircraft components, trucks, and ammunition.

16. Aikoku Maru. Freighter-passenger liner, 10,438 tons, 492 feet long. Aikoku was one of the finest cargo-passenger liners built in Japan just before hostilities. She was taken over by the Navy and converted to an armed merchant raider (auxiliary cruiser). By 1944, the ship was transporting cargo and troops to various islands in the Central Pacific. On February 16, she entered Truk Lagoon having come from Ponape. Lying in great depths from 130 feet to 240 feet, the wreck can be visited by only the most experienced divers. Human bones are found within the holds.

4. Lindermann, Hailstorm Over Truk, pp. 55-56, does not show the location of this popular wreck.

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17. Reiyo Maru. Freighter, 5,445 tons, 400 feet long. Constructed in 1920, the ship was taken over by the Japanese Army in 1941. Two years later, the Navy acquired Reiyo. This wreck, too, lies in deep water, the deck being at 175 feet.

18. Nagano Maru. Four-hold freighter, 3,810 tons, 320 feet long. First employed in Japan's coastal waters, Nagano was taken over by the Japanese Army in 1937 to serve as a transport in the war in China. At the time of the February raid on Truk, she was serving as an army auxiliary transport.

19. San Francisco Maru. Five-hold freighter, 5,864 tons, 385 feet long. Built in 1919, San Francisco came to a sudden end when bombs hit her on February 17. Most of her cargo was military ordnance--tanks, mines, and torpedo bodies.

20. Shotan Maru. Four-hold freighter, 1,999 tons. Shotan was underway when the American attack came, but dive bombers put an end to her. The wreck contains artifacts ranging from trucks to dishes.

21. Seiko Maru. Five-hold freighter, 5,386 tons, 395 feet long. Like most of the sunken ships, Seiko's equipment is heavily encrusted with living corals and sponges. The ship's bell has been salvaged.

22. Hokuyo Maru. Four-hold freighter, 4,217 tons, 354 feet long. Hokuyo was sunk on the first day of the February attack. She rests in deep water--165 feet to her deck. The holds were empty of cargo.

23. Ojima. Salvage and repair ship, 750 tons. She was destroyed in October 1943 when fighting an accidental fire on a ship containing ammunition in the lagoon. The vessel is severely broken up. Landing craft and other wreckage are found in the area.

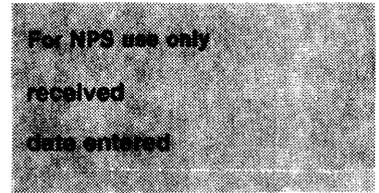
24. Kikukawa Maru. Freighter, 3,833 tons, 355 feet long. Kikukawa is the ship that caught fire in 1943 and exploded, destroying Ojima, above. Only the foreship is intact. Miscellaneous cargo lies scattered about.

25. Hoki Maru. Freighter, 7,112 tons, 450 feet long. A New Zealand ship, she was seized by Japanese auxiliary cruisers in 1942. Hoki arrived at Truk in January 1944. A bulldozer on board, possibly of American make, has given the ship the local name of "Bulldozer Wreck."

26. Fujikawa Maru. Six-hold freighter, 6,938 tons, 435 feet long. Completed in 1938, Fujikawa was taken over by the Imperial Navy in 1940 and converted to an aircraft ferry. An American submarine damaged her with a torpedo in 1943; but she reached Truk where she was repaired as a general transport. Her cargo includes artillery shells, small arms ammunition, aircraft parts, and fighter planes.

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27. Unkai Maru. Five-hold freighter, 3,188 tons, 305 feet long. An ancient, coal-burning vessel, Unkai was built in England in 1905 and first named Venus. Japan purchased the ship in 1911.

28. Gosei Maru. Coastal freighter, 1,931 tons, 270 feet long. Gosei was sunk on February 18. Its cargo of live torpedoes continued to explode over time until, in 1976, an explosive charge was set off to make the wreck safe for diving. Lying in shallow water, Gosei is a favorite photographic subject.

29. Rio de Janeiro Maru. Passenger liner, 9,627 tons, 450 feet long. Built in the late 1920s, this ship served the Japan-South America-United States West Coast route. The Japanese Navy converted her to a submarine tender and depot ship in 1940. In April 1943 she was reclassified as a transport and based at Truk. Cargo consists of a coastal gun, coal, and saki bottles.

30. Amagisan Maru. Special transport, 7,621 tons, 450 feet long. This large freighter rests on sloping ground. Water depth to the bow is 100 feet, while the stern is under 180 feet of water. Little cargo was on board, but a sedan automobile remains in a hold. The mess contains china and tableware.

31. Sankisan Maru. Freightler, 4,776 tons, 368 feet long. The Japanese Navy acquired this vessel in October 1943. Settled in shallow water (the foremast breaks the water), Sankisan is visited often. An explosion blew the aftership apart, but the remainder of the wreck contains a varied cargo: trucks, small arms ammunition, aircraft parts, and coal. Small reef fish and corals flourish at the site.

32. Hino Maru 2. Freightler, 999 tons, 200 feet long. Called "One-Gun Boat," this small vessel was destroyed by bombs. Its bow gun, only three feet under water, is heavily photographed.

33. Interisland Supply Vessel. It is about 120 feet in length and its gross tonnage is about 800 tons. This small coastal oiler serviced the fleet at Truk. Marine growth on the wreck is outstanding.

34. Subchaser No. 38. About 300 tons. This vessel may have been a small merchant ship that was converted to anti-submarine duty. It sank in shallow water.

35. Taiho Maru. Four-hold freighter, 2,829 tons, 305 feet long. Only the aft section survived an explosion. Two landing craft lie nearby. Cargo consists of steel drums.

Other wreckage that has been found in this anchorage includes:

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Pieces of Japanese aircraft east of Eten and west of Param, both islands having had airstrips.

Emily Flying Boat. This huge plane sank south of Dublon Island. Local tradition holds that the aircraft was returning to Truk from a military conference at Palau with high-ranking officers on board. Attacked by American fighters, it succeeded in making a crash landing in the lagoon. No date has been ascribed to the incident.

Betty Bomber. This bomber crashed short of the Eten runway. Although damaged, the aircraft did not disintegrate.

In addition to the vessels that sank in the anchorages described above, other wrecks have been found in Truk Lagoon:

Fujisan Maru. Tanker, 9,524 tons, 512 feet long. This ship attempted but failed to flee Truk Lagoon on February 17. Next day, she was again under steam when she was sunk in the channel between Moen and Dublon.

Hanakawa Maru. Freighter, 4,793 tons, 368 feet long. This ship was sunk near Tol Island. Because the wreck emits a skin-burning substance, it has been declared off limits to visiting divers.

Another ship believed to have been sunk in the lagoon has not yet been located, the destroyer Oite. Oite left Truk on January 15, 1944, en route to Japan. On January 17, she was ordered to return to Truk to escort any ships that had left the lagoon. Finding none, Oite dashed through North Pass and sped toward Dublon. Attacked by torpedo planes, Oite broke in two and quickly sank. Only a few survivors were rescued.

During the second carrier attack on Truk, April 30, 1944, two ships were sunk whose locations have not yet been accounted for: Sapporo Maru and Minsei Maru.

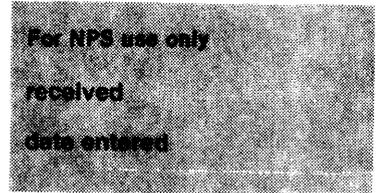
The shipwrecks at Truk have been transformed into colorful undersea gardens. Hard and soft corals, sponges, and algae of countless varieties and colors adorn the vessels. Tropical fish dazzle the beholder's eye.⁵

The government of Truk has declared the underwater fleet in Truk Lagoon a state historic monument. Visiting divers are required to be escorted by authorized guides in an effort to reduce vandalism and theft of artifacts.

5. Philip Alan Rosenberg, Shipwrecks of Truk (n.p., 1981). This book contains magnificent color photographs of the ships, artifacts, and marine life.

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The area recommended as a National Historic Landmark is all of Truk Lagoon within the coral reef that surrounds it. It does not include the islands within the lagoon, some of which have been entered in the National Register of Historic Places.

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by American aircraft in an ambush attack, he was replaced by Adm. Mineichi Koga, whose flagship at Truk was the mighty Musashi.

Although the Imperial Navy established coastal and antiaircraft defenses at Truk, ground defenses were not intensified until the arrival of the first elements of the Army's Fifty-second Division between November 1943 and January 1944.³

Ground defenses--air raid shelters, bombproof tunnels, and alternate gun emplacements--were not completed until August 1944, well after the United States had decided to bypass Truk.

American Advances, 1944

In early February 1944, U.S. Marine and Army troops captured Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, 955 miles east of Truk. The battle for Kwajalein was carried out so swiftly and successfully that Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific, concluded to speed up the Central Pacific campaign. He directed the immediate invasion of Enewetak Atoll, also in the Marshalls, which had originally been set for May 1. Because Enewetak was only 670 miles from Japan's Gibraltar of the Pacific, Truk, Nimitz decided that a strong attack on Truk to neutralize Japanese forces there was a necessary adjunct to the Enewetak assault, now scheduled for February 17, 1944.

American intelligence knew little about Truk except its alleged invulnerability. On February 4, a U.S. Marine Corps Catalina flew over the atoll on a photographic mission. This reconnaissance showed that a Japanese battleship (Musashi), two carriers, ten cruisers, twenty destroyers, twelve submarines, and a large number of transports were in the lagoon. Japanese planes rose to the attack, but the flying boat evaded interception and returned safely to base with the important information. At Truk, the Japanese correctly judged this overflight presaged an enemy attack. Admiral Koga ordered the fleet to weigh anchor. On February 10, led by Musashi, Japanese warships sailed for the Western Pacific, never to return to Truk. The battleship steamed toward Japan. Other warships withdrew to the Palau Islands and to the Philippines. About forty vessels, some undergoing repair, others loading or unloading cargo, remained in the lagoon.

Before dawn on February 17,⁴ Vice Adm. Raymond A. Spruance, on board battleship New Jersey, sailed toward Truk. Under him, Rear Adm. Marc A. Mitscher, Yorktown, commanded Task Force 58, consisting of nine carriers, six

3. The balance of the division did not arrive at Truk until after the February raid.

4. February 16th in Hawaii.

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battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. Nine patrol submarines accompanied the force. Japanese search planes on the previous days had failed to detect the approaching fleet and on this morning the Japanese were unprepared for the coming onslaught. Mitscher's first objective was to gain air superiority, as the Japanese had done on their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. At sunrise, 72 American fighters from five fast carriers struck. Some 90 Japanese planes took to the air but over thirty of them were shot down. The American Hellcats then hit the airfields on Moen, Eten, and Param, destroying forty more planes. Only four Hellcats failed to return to the carriers. Next, Avenger torpedo bombers hit the airstrips with fragmentation and incendiary bombs, again with few casualties. Eten was particularly easy pickings; aircraft were parked nose to tail awaiting ferry pilots to fly them to forward areas.

Mitscher's aircraft, including torpedo planes, dive bombers, and escort fighters next attacked enemy shipping. Although disappointed that the Japanese fleet was no longer present, the American pilots made 30 separate attacks throughout the day. They wiped out the few naval ships in anchorage and most of the 30 or so merchant ships, for a total of 200,000 tons sunk. Meanwhile, Spruance's surface ships cruised around the atoll in pursuit of escaping Japanese ships. By evening they had sunk a cruiser, destroyer, trawler, and another small vessel.

During the night of February 17-18, a Japanese torpedo plane managed to approach carrier Intrepid and loosed a torpedo, striking the carrier on her starboard quarter and causing casualties and damage. Intrepid limped from the scene and eventually reached San Francisco for repairs. Also on that night, Mitscher launched the first nighttime bombing attack in American carrier operational history. Guided by radar, the highly trained bomber crews succeeded in making eleven direct hits on enemy vessels (and on two small islets).

When carrier strikes resumed on the morning of February 18, not a single Japanese plane rose in protest. The American planes paid particular attention this day to land installations, blasting airstrips and fuel and ammunition dumps. At noon, Admiral Mitscher gave the order for retirement. The naval historian, Samuel Eliot Morison, wrote that as a result of this attack, Truk's "usefulness as a fleet anchorage and advanced naval base was gone after 18 February 1944. And the myth of Truk the Impregnable was shattered. Never again did the eight-rayed flag of Commander in Chief Combined Fleet meet the rising sun in Truk Lagoon."⁵ Not only did Truk's shipping lay at the bottom of the lagoon, less than 100 of Truk's 365 aircraft remained operational.

5. Samuel Eliot Morison, Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls, June 1942-April 1944, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, vol. 7 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), p. 331.

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Truk, 1944-1945

While the Japanese Navy never returned to Truk in force, for a time after the February raids the defenses of the atoll continued to be improved. Additional army troops arrived, underground defenses were constructed, mines were laid in the passes to the lagoon, and antisubmarine nets were emplaced. All these endeavors were for naught. On March 12, 1944, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that because of the successful February attack, Truk need not be invaded. They abandoned a plan that called for over five American divisions to be employed against the atoll. On April 30 and May 1, a second American fast carrier task force hit Truk. Of the 103 operational Japanese aircraft at the beginning of the attack, twelve survived. The few ships at anchor were destroyed. Land installations, the major objective of the strike, were battered.

Beginning in March 1944, the Seventh and Thirteenth Army Air Forces' B-24 bombers, based in newly won Kawjalein and Enewetak and in the South Pacific, began a series of raids on Truk, their primary objective being to keep the airfields inoperable, especially during the American campaign in the Marianas in the summer of 1944. When the Marianas were taken, huge airfields were constructed on Saipan, Tinian, and Guam for the B-29 Superfortress bomber. Before these planes were prepared to form the vast armadas for the long-range bombing of Japan, the air crews required further training to refine their techniques. Truk was selected as one of the targets for these training missions. Until the end of World War II, fresh B-29 air crews made routine missions over Truk. There was little of significance to bomb.

The surviving Japanese forces at Truk, starved for food and medical attention, formally surrendered aboard a United States destroyer on September 2, 1945.

Today, the "underwater fleet" at Truk, festooned with an infinite variety of marine life and containing the honored remains of Japanese warriors, is one of the world's underwater wonders.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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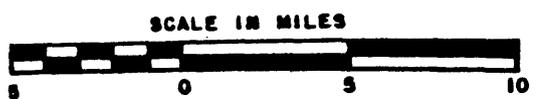
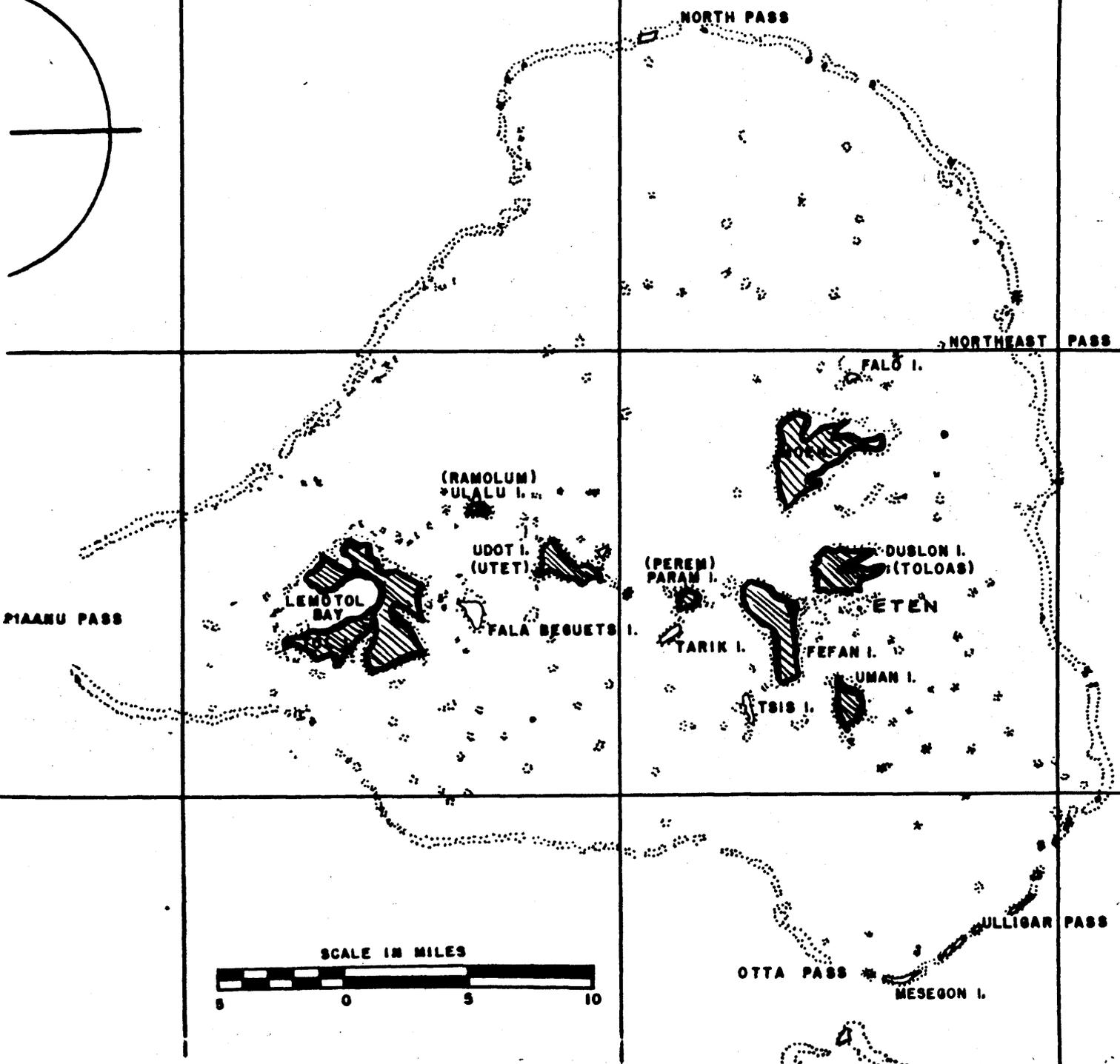
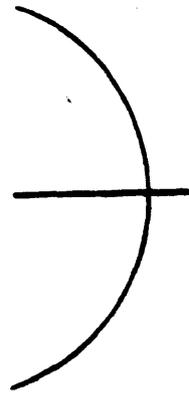
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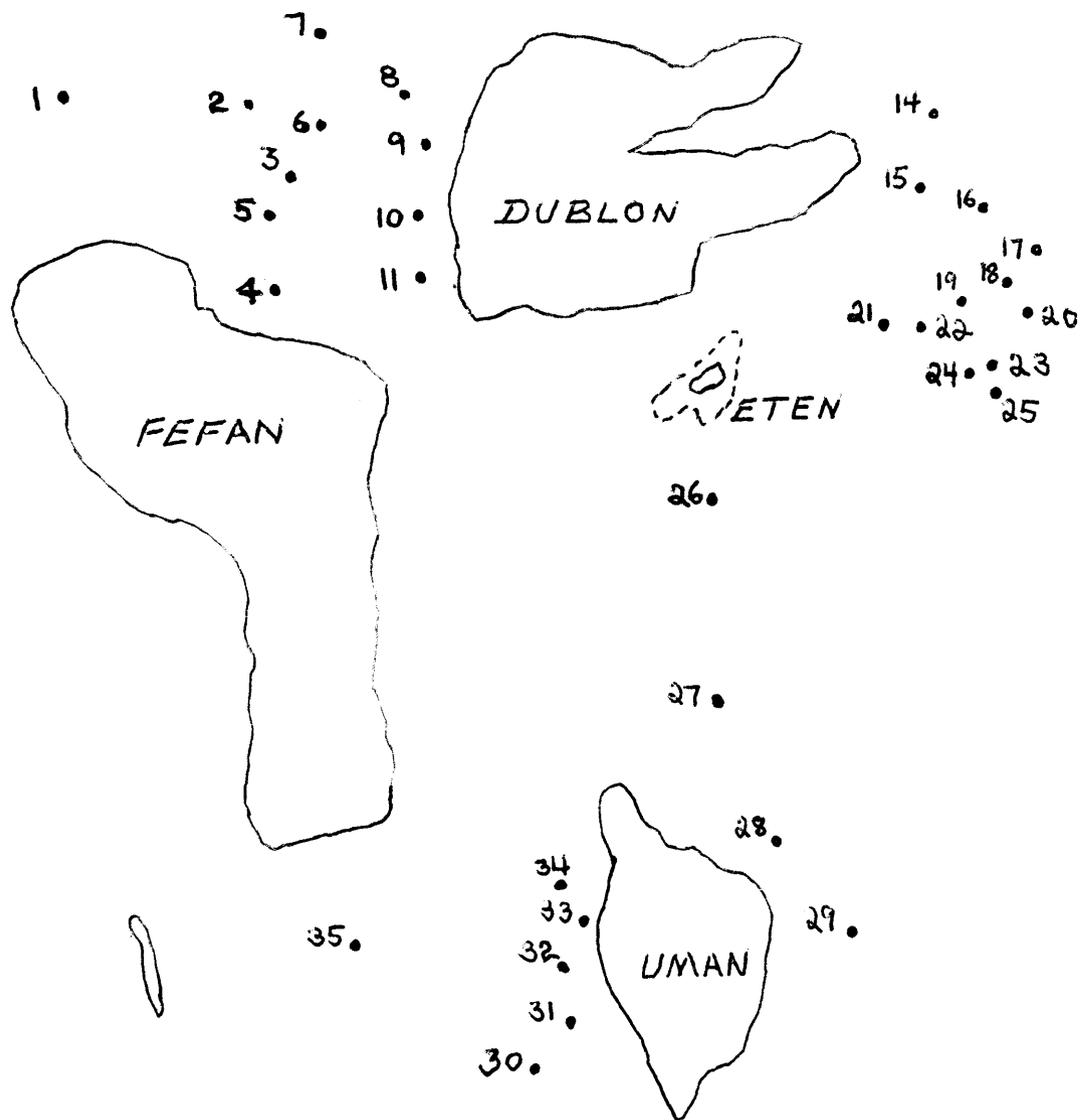
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TRUK ATOLL



Key to Locations of the Underwater Fleet, Truk

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| 1. <u>Yamagiri Maru</u> | 19. <u>San Francisco Maru</u> |
| 2. <u>Tonan Maru</u> | 20. <u>Shotan Maru</u> |
| 3. <u>Kiyozumi Maru</u> | 21. <u>Seiko Maru</u> |
| 4. <u>Hoyo Maru</u> | 22. <u>Hokuyo Maru</u> |
| 5. <u>Kansho Maru</u> | 23. <u>Ojima</u> |
| 6. <u>Daikichi Maru</u> | 24. <u>Kikukawa Maru</u> |
| 7. <u>I-169 Submarine</u> | 25. <u>Hoki Maru</u> |
| 8. <u>Heian Maru</u> | 26. <u>Fujikawa Maru</u> |
| 9. Harbor Tug | 27. <u>Unkai Maru</u> |
| 10. Fleet Tug | 28. <u>Gosei Maru</u> |
| 11. Patrol Boat 34 | 29. <u>Rio de Janeiro Maru</u> |
| 12. <u>Shinkoku Maru</u> (not shown) | 30. <u>Amagisan Maru</u> |
| 13. <u>Fumitsuki</u> (not shown) | 31. <u>Sankisan Maru</u> |
| 14. <u>Nippo Maru</u> | 32. <u>Hino Maru 2</u> |
| 15. <u>Momokawa Maru</u> | 33. <u>Interisland Supply Vessel</u> |
| 16. <u>Aikoku Maru</u> | 34. <u>Subchaser No. 38</u> |
| 17. <u>Reiyo Maru</u> | 35. <u>Taiho Maru</u> |
| 18. <u>Nagano Maru</u> | |



LOCATIONS OF UNDERWATER FLEET
 BASED ON KLAUS P. LINDEMANN, HAILSTORM OVER TRUK