



ISTRAŽIVANJE TEŠKOG BOMBARDERA B-24 H LIBERATORA *LADY LUCK* U PODMORJU OTOKA BIŠEVA

Investigation of the B-24 H Liberator “Lady Luck” heavy bomber in the waters off the island of Biševo

Vis je zbog strateškog položaja neosporno odigrao ključnu ulogu u spašavanju posada savezničkih aviona tijekom Drugoga svjetskog rata. Uzletno-sletna staza u Pliskom polju na otoku Visu, slovila je kao mjesto spasa, gdje je na tisuće članova posade zrakoplova oštećenih u misijama bombardiranja okupiranih područja pronašlo sigurno utočište (Frka 2021). Tijekom savezničkih misija bombardiranja znatan je broj zrakoplova doživio i oštećenja; zbog kvara opreme, ali i drugih razloga poput zauzetosti piste ili nepovoljnih vremenskih uvjeta, posada nije uspjela sigurno sletjeti na uzletno-sletnu stazu. Nesretna je sudbina zadesila i posadu teškog bombardera B-24#42-527 liberatora *Lady Luck*.

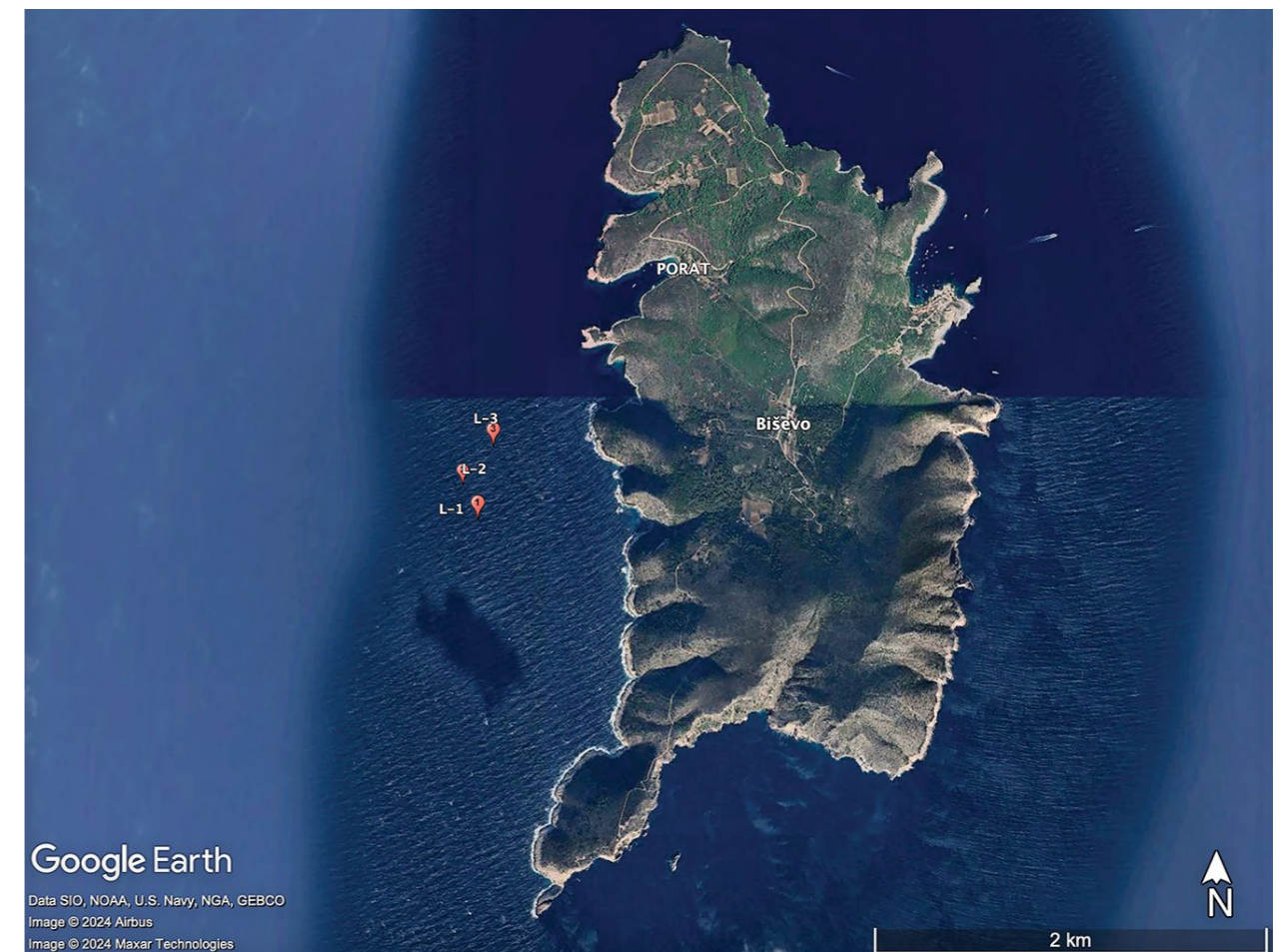
Due to its strategic location, Vis undoubtedly played a key role in rescue of Allied aircraft crews during World War II. The runway in Plisko polje on the island of Vis was known as a place of refuge, where thousands of crew members of the aircrafts damaged in bombing missions over occupied areas found safe haven (Frka 2021). During Allied bombing missions, a significant number of aircrafts were damaged; due to equipment failure, but also for other reasons such as the runway being occupied or adverse weather conditions, the crew was unable to land safely on the runway. An unfortunate fate also befell the crew of the B-24#42-527 *Lady Luck* heavy bomber.

Dana 17. studenoga 1944. godine 15. zračne snage uputile su 630 bombardera u pratnji lovaca u misiju bombardiranja naftnih rafinerija u industrijskim zonama Beča. U misiji je sudjelovao i bombarder B-24H #42-52774, nadimka *Lady Luck*, pod vodstvom pilota Henryja Millsa. Bombarder *Lady Luck* pripadao je 827. Bombarderskoj eskadrili 484. Bombarderske grupe, stacionirane u bazi Torreta u južnoj Italiji. Iako je cilj misije uspješno postignut, protuzračna je obrana oštetila motore bombardera. Upravljaajući avionom sa samo dva operativna motora, pilot Henry Mills odustaje od povratka u ishodišnu vojnu bazu Torreta na jugu Italije, te se pokušava domoći otoka Visa.

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Međutim, manevar slijetanja na uzletno-sletnu stazu u Pliskom polju na Visu ne uspijeva, a otkazuju i posljednja dva motora, te se avion naglo ruši u blizini Biševa. Snažan udar u morskou površinu slomio je trup aviona na dva dijela. U zastrašujućoj

On November 17, 1944, the 15th Air Force sent 630 bombers accompanied by fighters on a mission to bomb oil refineries in the industrial zones of Vienna. Bomber B-24H #42-52774, nicknamed *Lady Luck*, under pilot Henry Mills, also participated in the mission. The “Lady Luck” bomber belonged to the 827th Bombardment Squadron of the 484th Bombardment Group, stationed at the Torreta base in southern Italy. Although the mission objective was successfully achieved, the anti-aircraft defense damaged the bomber’s engines. Piloting a plane with only two operational engines, pilot Henry Mills decided not to return to the original military base of Torreta in the south of Italy, and tried to reach the island of Vis. However, the landing maneuver on the runway in Plisko polje on Vis failed, the last two engines also failed, and the plane suddenly crashed near Biševo. A strong im-



Zabilježena lokacija avionske nesreće zapadno od otoka Biševa. Oznake L-1, L-2 i L-3 predstavljaju tri koncentracije materijala na morskom dnu povezane s avionskom nesrećom i MACR 9931 (Google Maps)
Recorded location of the plane crash west of the island of Biševo. Labels L-1, L-2 and L-3 represent three concentrations of material on the seabed associated with the plane crash and MACR 9931 (Google Maps)



avionskoj nesreći preživio je samo pilot Henry Mills. Pronađeno je tijelo strojara, dok se ostalih sedam članova posade i dalje smatra nestalima.

Arheološki lokalitet s ostacima bombardera B-24 službeno je otkrio ronilac Siniša Ižaković, vlasnik Ronilačkog centra ISSA 2015. godine, a avion je uspješno je identificiran 2019. godine. Od 2021. godine mjesto je provedbe istraživanja u organizaciji Agencije za pronalazak ratnih zarobljenika / nestalih u akciji Ministarstva obrane Sjedinjenih Američkih Država (*Defense Prisoner of War / Missing in Action Accounting Agency* – u nastavku DPAA), s ciljem potrage za posmrtnim ostacima posade aviona, identifikacije pokojnika i njihove repatrijacije u Sjedinjene Američke Države. Od 6. rujna do 5. listopada 2024. godine organizirana je treća istraživačka kampanja, vođena kodom 24-3HR, u kojoj

pact on the sea surface broke the fuselage of the plane in two. Only pilot Henry Mills survived the terrifying plane crash. The body of the engineer was found, while the other seven crew members are still considered missing.

The archaeological site with the remains of the B-24 bomber was officially discovered in 2015 in 2015 by Siniša Ižaković, director of the ISSA Diving Center from Komiža and successfully identified in 2019. Since 2021, it has been the site of research organized by the Defense Prisoner of War / Missing in Action Accounting Agency (hereafter DPAA), with the aim of searching for the remains of the aircraft crew, identifying the deceased, and repatriating them to the United States. From September 6 to October 5, 2024, the third research campaign was organized, under the code 24-3HR, in which a team of DPAA

je tim suradnika DPAA-a, u sastavu *RPM Nautical Foundation* i direktora Jamesa Goolda (u nastavku RPM), Društva za dokumentiranje potopljenih nalazišta (*Society for the Documentation of Submerged Sites* – u nastavku SDSS), Ronilačkog centra Manta te predstavnika hrvatskih institucija sa Sveučilišta u Splitu i Sveučilišta u Zadru, istražio lokalitet s ostacima bombardera B-24H. Istraživanje je vodio Richard Hendren (RPM), a hrvatski istraživački tim su predstavljali Tea Katunarić Kirjakov (Sveučilište u Splitu) u funkciji voditelja arheologa i Katarina Batur (Sveučilište u Zadru), u funkciji zamjenika voditelja.

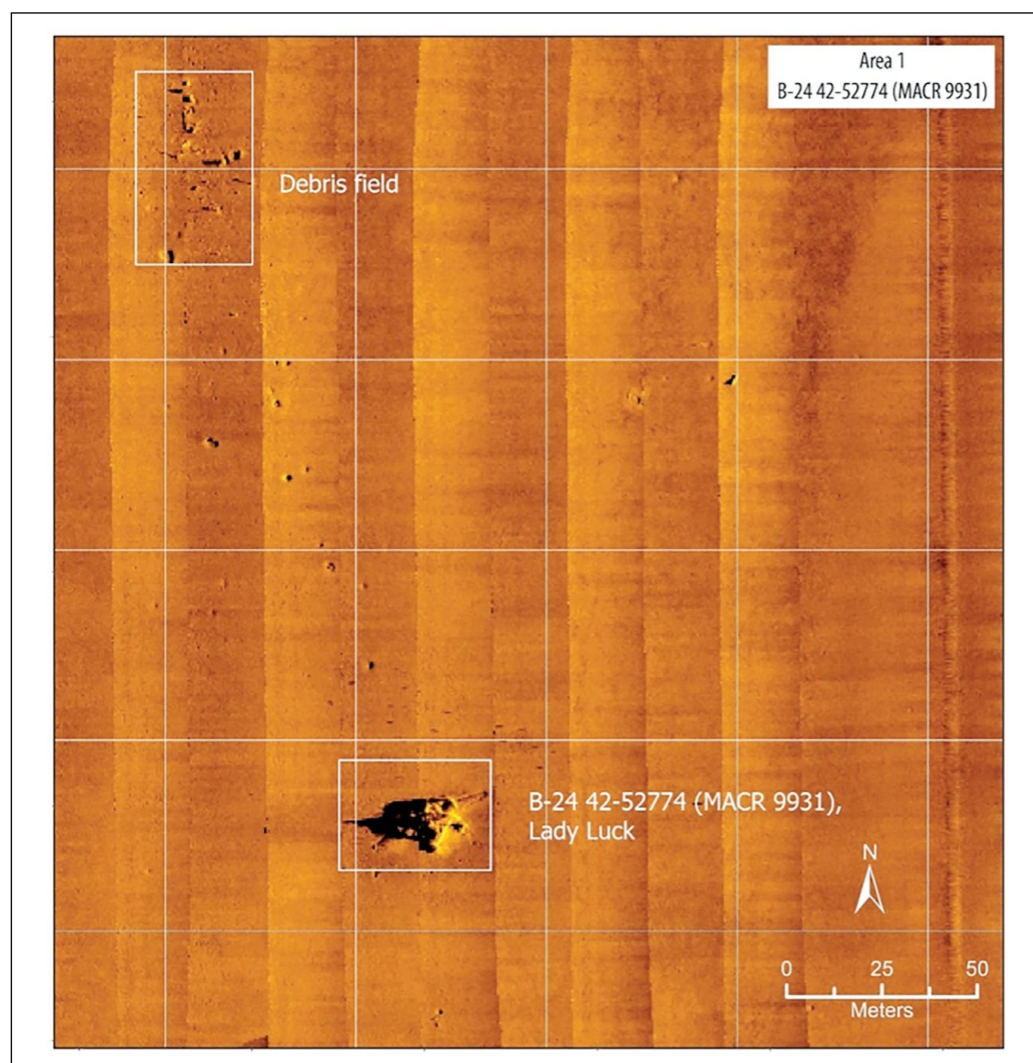
Podvodni arheološki lokalitet s ostacima aviona iz Drugoga svjetskog rata B24-H *Lady Luck* nalazi se zapadno od otoka Biševa u viškom arhipelagu na dubini od 90 metara. Nalazište obuhvaća ukupno tri položaja, od kojih je na položaju 1 koncentriran glavni dio olupine aviona (*Locus 1* – u nastavku L1), te ostala dva položaja koja sadrže krhotine olupine, fragmente pripadajuće opreme i neidentificirane dijelove (*Locus 2* – L2 i *Locus 3* – L3). Položaji svih triju lokacija zabilježeni su tijekom podvodnoga arheološkog pregleda bočnoskenirajućim sonarom, autonomnom ronilicom (AUV) i daljinski upravljanim podvodnim vozilom (ROV) tijekom prethodnih DPAA misija. Još uvijek nije u potpunosti sigurno povezuje li se područje 3 s avionskom nesrećom. Na području 1 nalazi se najveća koncentracija elemenata olupine. Olupina se sastoji od trupa s krilima, tj. od njegova repnog dijela, uz očuvane horizontalne i vertikalne stabilizatore. Očuvani dio trupa aviona orijentiran je na 335°, a slomljen je ispred odjeljka za municiju. Kokpit je u lošem stanju očuvanosti, dok se na nekim dijelovima trupa primjećuje očuvana oprema za spašavanje. Krila aviona, motori i oprema za slijetanje gotovo su netaknuti. Mjesto nesreće povezano je s izvješćem o avionskim nesrećama 9931 (*Missing Aircraft Crew Report MACR 9931*), u kojem je prema izjavama jedinoga preživjelog, pilota Henryja Millsa pisan tijekom događanja posljednje misije u kojoj je sudjelovao i bombarder B-24H, pokušaj slijetanja, avionska nesreća i spašavanje. S obzirom na to da je podvodni arheološki lokalitet s ostacima bombardera B-24H ujedno i ratna grobnica, istraživanju se pristupilo uz poštovanje i brigu o moguće očuvanim posmrtnim ostacima preminulih osoba. Nalazište je zaštićeno uzme li se u obzir da je dostupno samo uskom krugu ronilaca i rekreativaca osposobljenih za tehničko

associates, consisting of the RPM Nautical Foundation and the director James Goold (hereafter RPM), the Society for the Documentation of Submerged Sites (hereafter SDSS), and representatives of Croatian institutions from the University of Split and the University of Zadar, investigated the site with the remains of the B-24H bomber. The research was directed by Richard Hendren, the lead archeologist of RPM. The Croatian team was represented by Tea Katunarić Kirjakov (University of Split), serving as lead archaeologist and Katarina Batur (University of Zadar), as deputy lead archaeologist.

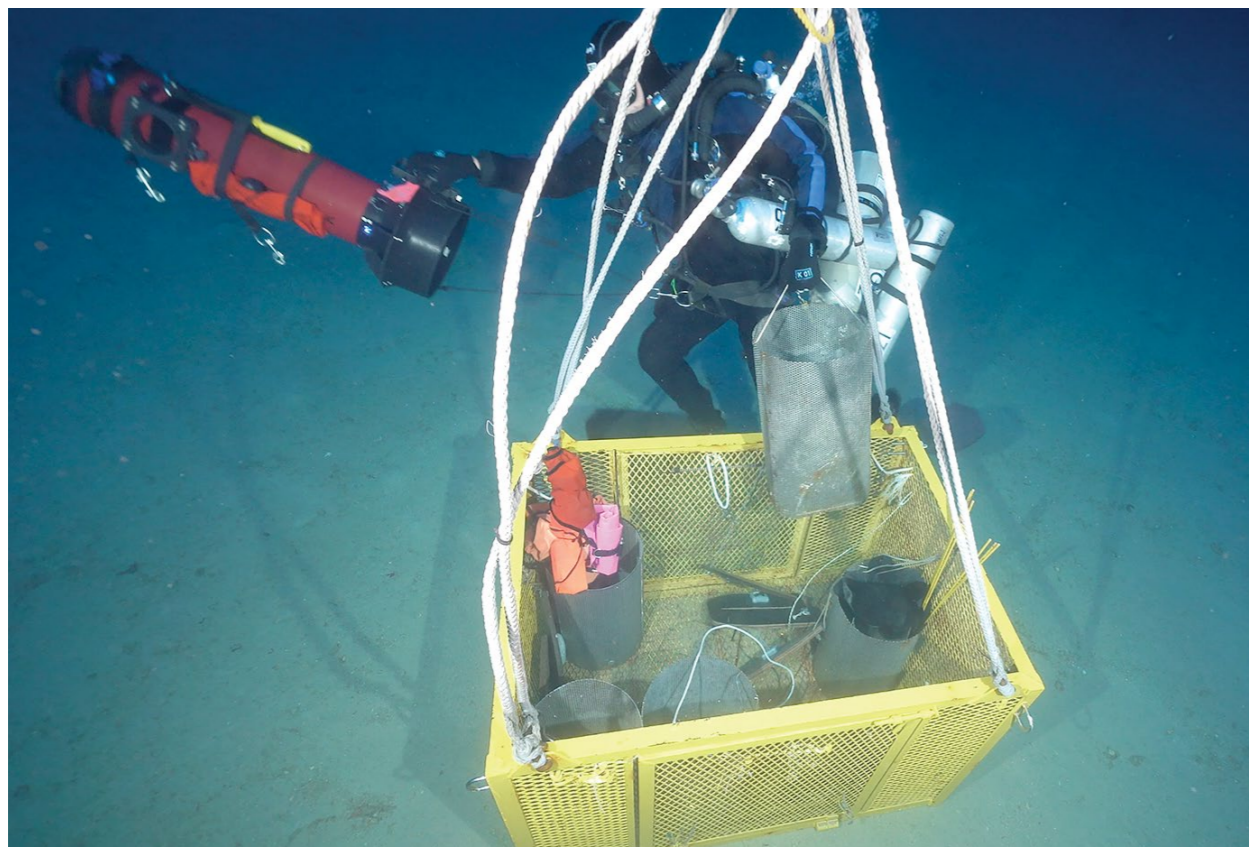
The underwater archaeological site with the remains of the World War II aircraft B24-H "Lady Luck" is located west of the island of Biševa in the Vis archipelago at a depth of 90 meters. The site includes a total of three locations. The main part of the aircraft wreckage is concentrated on location 1 (*Locus 1* – hereafter L1), and the other two locations contain wreckage debris, fragments of associated equipment and unidentified parts (*Locus 2* – L2 and *Locus 3* – L3). The positions of all three locations were recorded during underwater archaeological surveys using side-scan sonar, an autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) and a remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV) during previous DPAA missions. It is still not entirely certain whether area 3 is associated with the aircraft crash.

Area 1 contains the largest concentration of wreckage elements. The wreckage consists of the fuselage with wings, i.e. its tail section, with preserved horizontal and vertical stabilizers. The preserved part of the fuselage is oriented at 335° and is broken in front of the ammunition compartment. The cockpit is in a poor state of preservation, while preserved rescue equipment is noticeable on some parts of the fuselage. The wings of the aircraft, engines and landing gear are almost intact.

The crash site is linked to the plane crash report 9931 (*Missing Aircraft Crew Report MACR 9931*), written according to the statements of the only survivor, pilot Henry Mills, describing the course of events of the last mission involving the B-24H bomber, the landing attempt, the plane crash and the rescue. Given that the underwater archaeological site with the remains of the B-24H bomber is also a war grave, the research was approached with respect and care for the possibly preserved remains of deceased persons. The site is protected if we take into account that it is accessible only to a narrow circle of divers and recreationalists trained



Prikaz podataka dobivenih bočnoskenirajućim sonarom, uključujući koncentraciju glavnog dijela olupine Područje 1 (Locus 1) B-24 #42-52774 Lady Luck (MACR 9931) i povezano polje krhotina na Području 2 (Locus 2) na sjeveru (karta i podatci: Leila Character i Dan Davis, 22-3HR ASSR dokumentacija, DPAA)
Side-scan sonar data display, including the main wreckage concentration of Location 1 (Locus 1) B-24 #42-52774 "Lady Luck" (MACR 9931) and the associated debris field at Location 2 (Locus 2) to the north (map and data: Leila Character and Dan Davis, 22-3HR ASSR documentation, DPAA)



SDSS ronilac uzima filtre od nehrđajućeg čelika iz košara za podizanje (24-3HR dokumentacija, DPAA)
SDSS diver retrieves stainless steel filters from lifting baskets (24-3HR documentation, DPAA)

ronjenje na tim dubinama.

Kako je u prethodnim kampanjama provedeno dokumentiranje postojećeg stanja, a iskopavanje u 2023. godini donijelo obećavajuće rezultate, istraživanje provedeno u 2024. godini bilo je usredotočeno na iskopavanje u ciljanim sondama položaja 1. Istraživački brod *Hercules* svakodnevno je prelazio dnevnu rutu između Komiže i lokaliteta na zapadnoj strani otoka Biševa. Dokumentacijski posao odvijao se na *Herculesu*, dok je za ronilačke aktivnosti služila platforma Ronilačkog centra *Manta*. Radno vrijeme provedeno na dnu je iznosilo 30 minuta. Kada bi započeli izranjati, ronionci bi odaslali signalnu bovu, te se s pomoću podvodnog skutera uputili do uvale otoka Biševa gdje su i dovršavali dekompresiju u ukupnom trajanju od 150 minuta. Gumenjak *Hercules* RHIB, služio je kao ronilački sigurnosni brod, postavljen u more i pripremljen u slučaju opasnosti. Voditelj arheolog s istraživačkog je broda *Hercules* nadzirao tim ronilaca, omogućujući sastanke i dogovore prije i poslije ronjenja, te analize video i fotomaterijala.

Plan misije 24-3HR bio je potvrditi geografske koordinate položaja olupine bombardera, a potom angažirati ronioce da izrade fotodokumentaciju i pri-

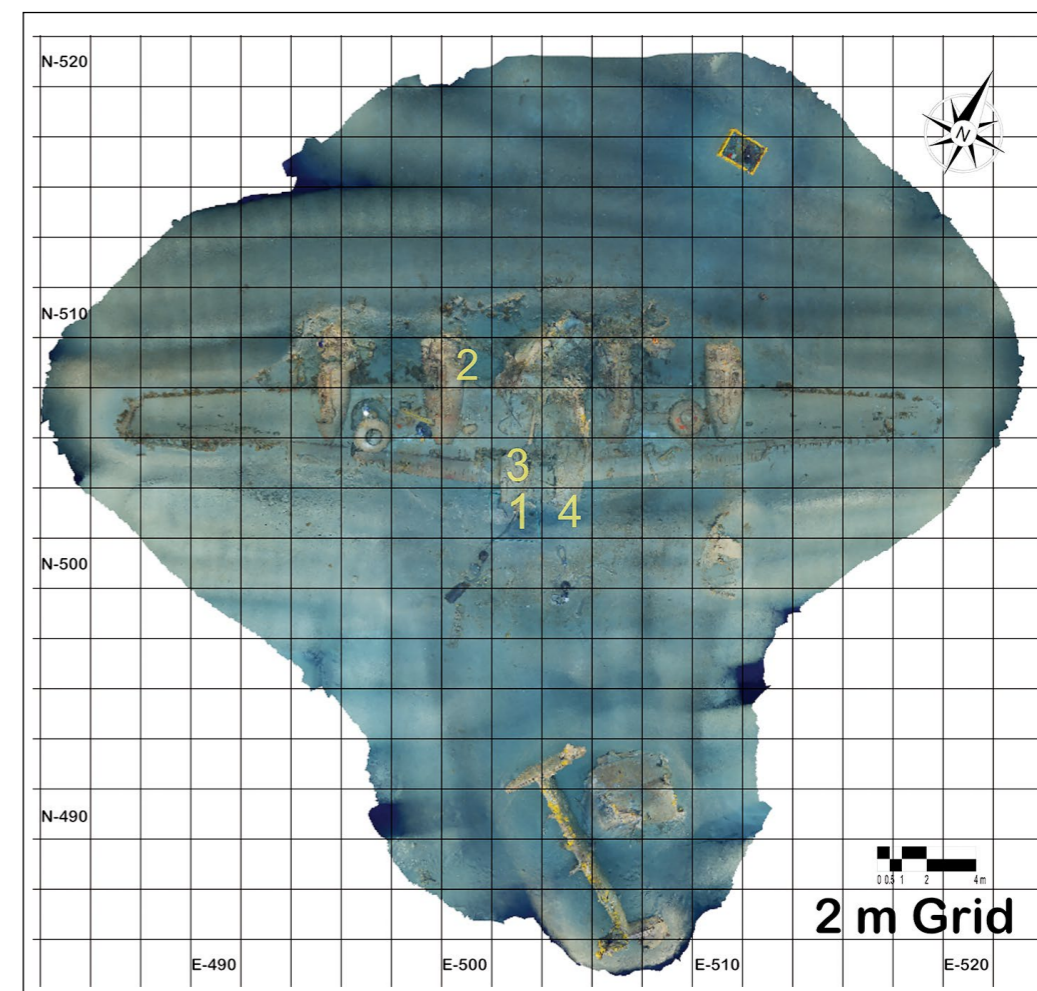
for technical diving at these depths.

As the previous campaigns documented the existing situation, and the excavation in 2023 brought promising results, the research carried out in 2024 was focused on the excavation in the targeted trial trenches of position 1. The research ship *Hercules* crossed the daily route between Komiža and the site on the western side of the island of Biševa every day. The documentation work took place on the *Hercules*, while the platform of the *Manta* Diving Center was used for diving activities. The working time spent at the bottom was 30 minutes. When they started surfacing, the divers would send a signal buoy, and with the help of an underwater scooter, they would go to the bay of the island of Biševa, where they would complete the decompression for a total of 150 minutes. The inflatable boat *Hercules* RHIB, served as a diving safety vessel, placed in the sea and prepared in case of danger. A lead archaeologist from the research vessel *Hercules* supervised the team of divers, facilitating meetings and arrangements before and after the dive, as well as analysis of video and photo material.

The 24-3HR mission plan was to confirm the geographic coordinates of the bomber wreck, then

prema arheološko nalazište za istraživanje. Priprema za istraživanje je obuhvatila postavljanje graničnih i sigurnosnih linija, sigurnosnih ronilačkih boca, usisa za iskopavanje, USBL odašiljača. Postavljanje USBL odašiljača, tj. podvodnih odašiljača koji određuju položaj na osnovi akustičnih valova, omogućilo je brže i jednostavnije pozicioniranje košara sa spremnicima sedimenta u blizini olupine bombardera. Dva su USBL odašiljača bila položena u liniji na morskom dnu, sjeverozapadno od olupine bombardera, a treći je odašiljač stavljen na košaru. Poravnanje USBL odašiljača promatralo se u *HiPAP* softveru, a zatim bi se košara spustila sjeverozapadno od linije prikazane na zaslonu, koju su tvorili USBL odašiljači na morskom dnu. Korištenjem USBL odašiljača i Kongsberg *HiPAP* sistema za pozicioniranje košara uštedio bi se barem jedan sat radnog dana dnevno, a metoda je omogućila i preciznost, pouzdanost i izbjegavanje potencijalnih opasnosti spuštanja košare direktno na olupinu.

engage divers to take photographs and prepare the archaeological site for exploration. Preparation for the exploration included the installation of boundary and safety lines, safety diving tanks, excavation suction, and USBL transmitters. The installation of USBL transmitters, i.e. underwater transmitters that determine position based on acoustic waves, enabled faster and easier positioning of the baskets with sediment containers near the bomber wreck. Two USBL transmitters were laid in a line on the seabed, northwest of the bomber wreck, and a third transmitter was placed on the basket. The alignment of the USBL transmitters was monitored in the *HiPAP* software, and the basket was then lowered northwest of the line shown on the screen, formed by the USBL transmitters on the seabed. Using the USBL transmitter and the Kongsberg *HiPAP* system for basket positioning saved at least one hour of work per day, and the method also enabled precision, reliability, and avoidance of the potential dangers of



Plan nalazišta s ucrtanim mrežicom i obilježenim kvadratima 1-4. Ortomozaik je generiran prema završnom fotogrametrijskom modelu i fotografijama snimljenim 5. listopada 2024. (24-3HR dokumentacija, DPAA)
Site plan with grid drawn and squares 1-4 marked. The orthomosaic was generated based on the final photogrammetric model and photographs taken on October 5, 2024 (24-3HR documentation, DPAA)





Istraživački tim prosijava izvađeni sediment na palubi Herculesa (24-3HR dokumentacija, DPAA)
The research team sieves the extracted sediment on the Hercules deck (24-3HR documentation, DPAA)

U ovogodišnjoj je kampanji postavljen i novi raspored mrežišta na položaju 1. Novo je mrežište poravnano s osi zrakoplova, a iskopavanje se obavljalo simultano unutar dvaju kvadrata. Iskopavalo se koristeći se dvama samostalnim SUEX-Discovery istraživačkim sustavima (SUEX Discovery Excavation Systems), koji se koriste podvodnim skuterom u funkciji usisne snage (SUEX Diver Propulsion Vehicle – DPV) u posebno dizajniranom kućištu. Sediment se pohranjivao u cilindrično spremište od karbonskih niti sa zamjenjivim elementima filtra od nehrđajućeg čelika. Na bočnim se stranama spremnika nalaze mrežice za prosijavanje koje omogućuju da se fini mulj iz sedimenta filtrira, a u spremniku ostaje krupniji materijal i sediment krupnijih čestica. Ovakav način rada zadržava 40 do 50 % iskopanog materijala, koji se zatim pregledava i prosijava na palubi *Herculesa*. Nakon što su sedimenti prebačeni u kante s oznakama položaja iskopa, na svakom je zasebno obavljeno mokro prosijavanje kroz metalnu mrežu okna 0,65 cm i ispiranjem pod slabim pritiskom u manjim skupinama, kako bi se kontroliralo ispiranje i pregledali potencijalni nalazi. Potencijalni su nalazi zadržani, označeni, pregledani prema standardima DPAA dokumentacije, a svi nedijagnostički materija-

lowering the basket directly onto the wreck.

In this year's campaign, a new layout of the grid was set at position 1. The new mesh was aligned with the axis of the aircraft, and excavation was performed simultaneously within two squares. It was excavated using two independent SUEX-Discovery research systems (SUEX Discovery Excavation Systems), which use an underwater scooter in the function of suction power (SUEX Diver Propulsion Vehicle - DPV) in a specially designed housing. Sediment was stored in a cylindrical reservoir made of carbon filaments with replaceable stainless steel filter elements. On the sides of the tank, there are sieving meshes that allow the fine sludge to be filtered out of the sediment, while coarser material and sediment with larger particles remain in the tank. This mode of operation retains 40 to 50% of the excavated material, which is then screened and examined on board the Hercules.

After the sediments were transferred to marked bins, each was individually wet screened through a 0.65 cm mesh screen and washed under low pressure in small batches to control the washout and examine potential finds. Potential finds were retained, marked, examined according to DPAA documentation standards, and all non-diagnostic materials

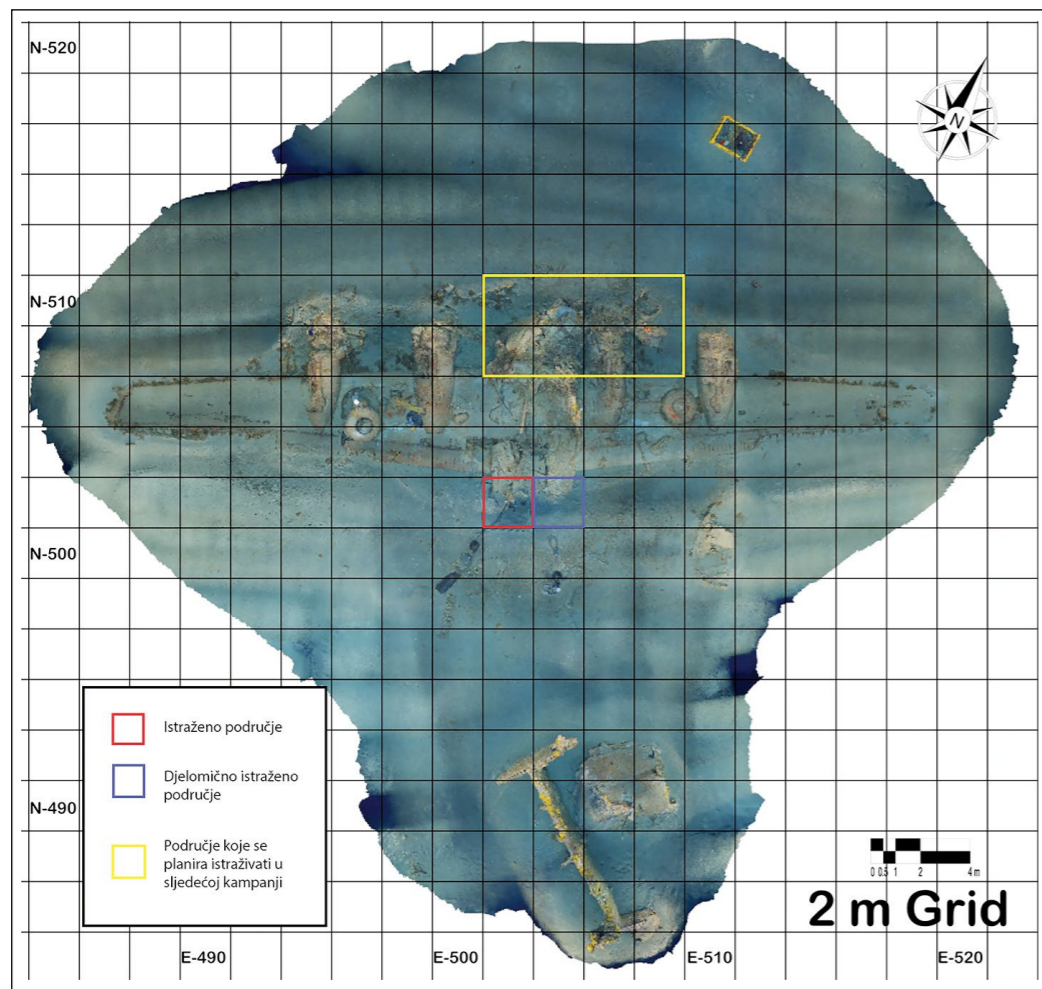


Zrakoplovna krila i ručni sat izvađeni su iz kvadrata 1 (N502, E502) (24-3HR dokumentacija, DPAA)
Aviator wings and wristwatch were removed from square 1 (N502, E502) (24-3HR documentation, DPAA)



Pojas za spašavanje i deklaracija predani su u Zavičajni muzej grada Visa (24-3HR dokumentacija, DPAA)
The life jacket and the declaration were submitted to the Vis Heritage Museum (24-3HR documentation, DPAA)





Plan nalazišta prikazuje istražena, djelomično istražena te područja u kojima se preporučuju istraživanja u sljedećoj planiranoj kampanji (24-3HR dokumentacija, DPAA)
 The site plan shows the investigated, partially investigated, and areas where investigation is recommended in the next campaign (24-3HR documentation, DPAA)

li pronađeni u ispranom i prosijanom sedimentu stavljeni su u kantu ispunjenu morskom vodom, spakirani u vrećicu i vraćeni na nalazište. Opisana metodologija uspješno je korištena sve do kraja projekta.

Nakon dokumentacije postojećeg stanja fotografiranjem, skupina elemenata horizontalnih i vertikalnih stabilizatora i pridružen dio trupa pomaknuti su kako bi se omogućio pristup području od interesa i nastavio iskop. Korištena je ista metoda pozicioniranja kao i u slučaju podizanja košara, uz razliku što je kao pomična sila, umjesto dizalice *Herculesa*, korištena platforma Ronilačkog centra *Manta*. Akciju je pratio voditelj istraživanja na zaslону računala koristeći se *Kongsberg HiPAP* softverom. Sve intervencije na nalazištu provedene su u konzultaciji i nakon službenog odobrenja Konzervatorskog odjela u Splitu.

Iskopavanje je provedeno u ukupno četiri kvadrata. U kvadratu 1 pronađeni su svi materijalni nalazi prikupljeni tijekom istraživanja. Ronioci su

found in the washed and screened sediment were placed in a bin filled with seawater, bagged, and returned to the site. The described methodology was successfully used until the end of the project.

After documenting the existing condition by photogrammetry, the group of horizontal and vertical stabilizer elements and the associated hull section were moved to allow access to the area of interest and to continue the excavation. The same positioning method was used as in the case of lifting the baskets, with the difference that the platform of the Manta Diving Center was used as the moving force, instead of the Hercules crane. The action was monitored by the research leader on the computer screen using Kongsberg HiPAP software. All site interventions were carried out in consultation with and after the official approval of the Conservation Department in Split.

Excavation was carried out in a total of four squares. All the material finds collected during the research were found in square 1. The divers already

već u prethodnoj kampanji ovdje primijetili padobran. Područje iskopa u ovom kvadratu obuhvatilo je dio trupa, na kojem je bilo skladište za municiju. Iskopavanje provedeno u kvadratima 2, 3 i 4 nije donijelo bitne rezultate. Budući da kvadrat 1 i 4 nisu istraženi do sterilnog sloja, preporučuje se nastavak istraživanja u nadolazećoj misiji. U kvadratu 1 pronađeni su mogući materijalni nalazi (*possible material evidence – PME*), te mogući ljudski ostatci (*possible human remains – PHR*). Mogući materijalni nalazi uključuju fragmente ručnog sata i zrakoplovna krila. Materijali koji nisu povezani s nesrećom su također izvađeni: oni uključuju fragmente oplata, kopče za opremu, kovanice, gumbe, prsluk za spašavanje. Svi nedijagnostički artefakti opisani su, fotografirani, a zatim pohranjeni s pripadajućom oznakom u kvadrat 2. Prsluk za spašavanje i pripadajuća deklaracija predani su Zavičajnom muzeju grada Visa na trajnu pohranu.

Tijekom rujna i listopada 2024. godine provelo se podvodno arheološko istraživanje u kojem je nastavljeno istraživanje lokaliteta s ostacima aviona iz Drugoga svjetskog rata B-24 H *Lady Luck* u blizini otoka Biševa. Tim se usredotočio na istraživanje trupa aviona u dijelu spremnika za municiju, gdje se konstrukcija slomila pod snažnim udarom o morsku površinu. U području 1 (L1) istraženi su kvadrati 1 i 4. Još su dva dodatna kvadrata istražena (2 i 3), ali tijekom iskopa i prosijavanja sedimenta ovdje nisu pronađeni materijalni ili koštani nalazi. Ako se istraživanja na nalazištu nastave, preporučuje se nastavak iskopa u kvadratima 1 i 4, te pregled unutarnjeg dijela trupa aviona. U nadolazećim se istraživanjima preporučuje i pomicanje dijelova olupine aviona kako bi se omogućio pristup i istraživanje područja od interesa.

noticed the parachute here in the previous campaign. The excavation area in this square included part of the hull, where there was a storage for ammunition. The excavation carried out in squares 2, 3 and 4 did not bring significant results. Since squares 1 and 4 have not been explored up to the sterile layer, it is recommended to continue the exploration in the upcoming mission.

Possible material evidence (PME) and possible human remains (PHR) were found in square 1. Possible material evidence included fragments of a wristwatch and an aviator wing. Materials not related to the accident were also recovered: these included fragments of plating, equipment buckles, coins, buttons, a life jacket. All non-diagnostic artifacts were described, photographed, and then stored with the corresponding label in square 2. The life jacket and its accompanying declaration were transferred to the Vis Heritage Museum for permanent storage.

During September and October 2024, an underwater archaeological survey was conducted to continue the investigation of the World War II site containing the remains of the B-24 H "Lady Luck" aircraft near the island of Biševa. The team focused on the investigation of the aircraft fuselage in the ammunition storage part, where the structure broke under a strong impact with the sea surface. In area 1 (L1), squares 1 and 4 were investigated. Two additional squares were investigated (2 and 3), but no material or bone finds were recovered here during the excavation and sieving of the sediment. If the site investigation continues, it is recommended to continue the excavation in squares 1 and 4, and to examine the interior of the aircraft fuselage. In the upcoming investigations, it is also recommended to move parts of the aircraft wreckage to allow access and investigation of areas of interest.

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