

Japanese battleship blew up under water, footage suggests (Update)

March 13 2015, by Mari Yamaguchi



This Friday, March 13, 2015 image made from a video captured by an unmanned underwater probe and provided by Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Paul Allen shows what Allen's team believes is a massive Japanese World War II battleship sunk off the coast of the Philippines. (AP Photo/Paul G. Allen)

Debris scattered over a large area at the bottom of sea in the Philippines indicate that the massive Japanese World War II battleship Musashi had blown up in an undersea explosion after it sank beneath the surface 70

years ago.

Experts from a research team analyzing a live feed from an unmanned submersible Friday said they believe the Musashi suffered at least one explosion while sinking to the 1,000-meter (3,280-foot) deep seafloor, which wasn't known previously. The 2 ½-hour feed provided the first detailed images of the ship, which sank in October 1944.

The research team, sponsored by Microsoft co-founder and entrepreneur Paul Allen, first found the remains of the ship in early March after searching for it for eight years.

The Musashi, one of Japan's biggest and most famous battleships, sank in the Sibuyan Sea in the central Philippines during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, losing half of its 2,400 crew. It was last seen disappearing into the water in one piece after being struck by torpedoes, but what happened subsequently was never known.

"The wreck is actually very damaged," said David Mearns, a marine scientist on the team. "It appears she suffered at least one, if not two, magazine explosions which would have sheered off the bow and the stern, and its entire middle section of its super-structure."

The footage showed fish and other marine creatures occasionally swimming by the rusted debris scattered over a wide area, some chunks covered by coral.



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There were holes in the bow area, apparently made by U.S. torpedoes, and the ship's stern is upside down. A propeller is torn off from a shaft and gun turrets and catapults are broken off.

The feed also showed a round teak base on the bow that held the Imperial chrysanthemum seal that only a few battleships were allowed to carry—a key finding that convinced Japanese experts and some survivors that this was indeed the remains of the Musashi.

Historian Kazushige Todaka, head of the Yamato Museum and an expert on warships, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that he was "100 percent positive" the ship is the Musashi.

He said the upright bow section and the upside-down stern mean the ship had an explosion.

"It shows there was a tremendous impact that tore the ship apart," he said.



Shigeru Nakajima, 94, former crew and a survivor of the Japanese Imperial Navy's battleship Musashi, speaks while he watches a live streaming of the sunken ship on a computer in Kashiwa, near Tokyo, Friday, March 13, 2015. Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Paul Allen and his research team have found a massive Japanese World War II battleship off the Philippines near where it sank more than 70 years ago. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

Closer examination of the video would help explain what happened to the ship as it sank to the sea bottom, he said. He also hoped this would lead to discovery of other sunken warships that are unaccounted for.

Shigeru Nakajima, a 94-year-old former electrical technician on the Musashi, one of only a few hundred aboard who made it safely back to Japan, told the AP he was deeply moved by the footage he saw Friday at a community center near his home in Kashiwa, near Tokyo.

"The captain and those who went down (with the Musashi) must be delighted in heaven by the news of the discovery," he said.



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The team says it is collaborating with the governments of Japan and the Philippines over the wreckage. Experts here say it would be difficult to pull up the ship, though technically it may be possible. Some people consider the wreckage as a place where the spirits of the victims rest and

should be left at peace.

The timing of the discovery, coming shortly before the 70th anniversary of the war's end, is particularly significant, said Todaka, "as if telling us not to forget the tragedy of the war."



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More information: Musashi Expedition: musashi.paulallen.com/

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