

An aerial photograph of the SS Montebello, a large cargo ship, navigating a wide river. The ship is dark-colored with a prominent white 'U' on its black smokestack. It has multiple masts and rigging. The river is light-colored, possibly due to sand or silt. In the background, a sandy bar or delta is visible, with a small cluster of buildings on the left. The far bank is covered in dense evergreen forest.

# SS MONTEBELLO

*By: Stephen L. Sawyer  
Assistant Chief Counsel  
Department of Fish and Game  
Office of Spill Prevention and Response*

**Launched**  
**Southwestern Shipbuilding Company**  
**San Pedro, California 24 January 1921**







### Tonnage

Gross: 8272

Net: 5107

Displacement: 17,415

Deadweight: 12,000

### Dimensions (feet)

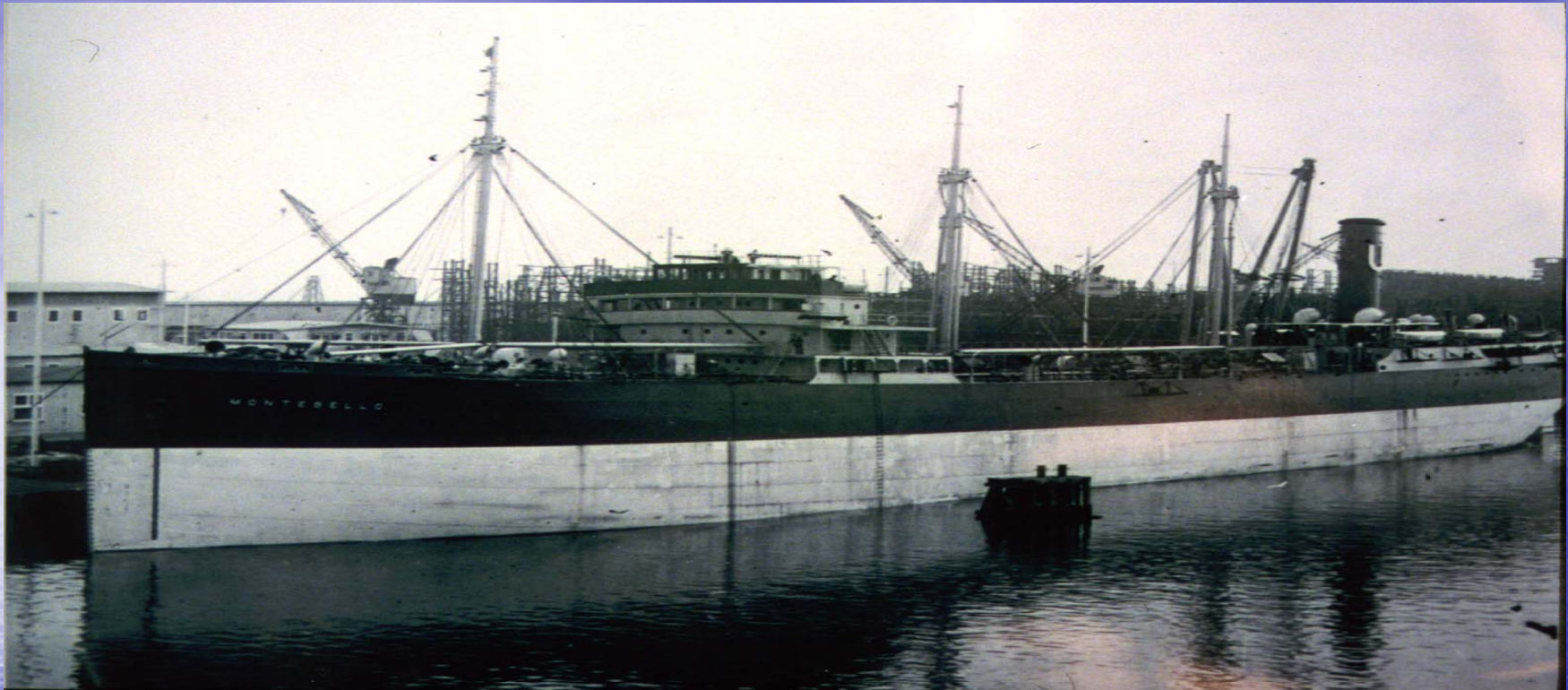
Length:

- Registered: 440.0

- Overall: 457.0

Beam: 58.2

Depth of Hold: 32.8



### Cargo Capacity (barrels)

Main cargo tanks 72,858

Summer tanks: 9,192

Total: 82,050 barrels

Average Cargo 76,500 barrels



**December 22, 1941, *Montebello* Loads  
73,571 barrels (3,089,982 U.S. gallons)  
of Santa Maria Crude oil at Port San Luis**



**Cargo 21.81 Gravity  
Bunker: 2477 barrels**

**December 23, 1941**  
**Departs Port San Luis at 1:30 a.m.**  
**Destination British Columbia**





# 38 Crewmen Onboard



At 5:40 a.m.  
Japanese submarine I-21 fires a  
single torpedo into starboard bow

#### The Tides

Dec. 24: High—5:55 a. m.; 4.0 ft.; 5:27 p. m.; 4.5 ft.  
Low—9:01 a. m.; 2.8 ft.; 9:35 p. m.; 3.5 ft.  
Dec. 25: High—6:18 a. m.; 4.1 ft.; 6:18 p. m.; 4.1 ft.  
Low—11 a. m.; 1.8 ft.; 10:52 p. m.; 1.8 ft.

## San Luis Obispo Telegram-Tribune

I am looking forward to visiting you in the  
United States in the White House at Washington.  
—Admiral Yamamoto, Japanese Naval  
Commander.

SEVENTY-THIRD YEAR, NO. 123

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1941.

PRICE 5 CENTS

# JAP SUB SINKS TANKER HERE

\*\*\*  
Roosevelt, Churchill Confer in Washington on Unified War Conduct  
\*\*\*

## 36 Crewmen Saved In Three Lifeboats

All 36 members of the crew of the Union Oil tanker Montebello were safe today after Japanese operating a big submarine sank the boat at 6 a.m. off the coast at Piedras Blancas in San Luis Obispo county and fired on the men as they left the sinking tanker in three lifeboats.

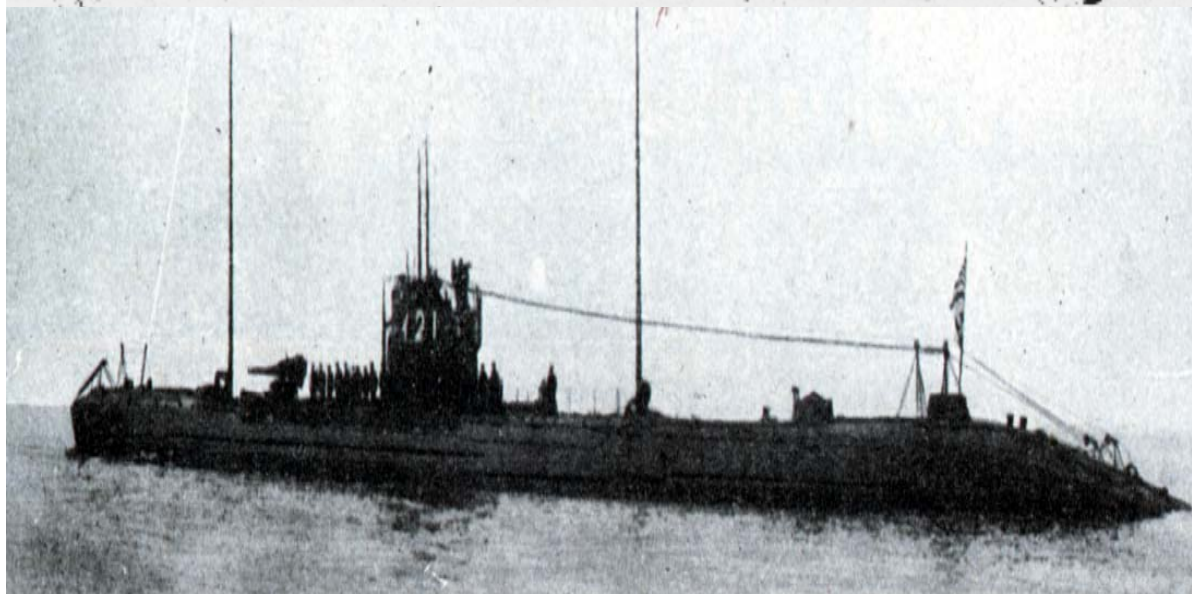
The loaded, 800-ton tanker, struck almost amidships with a torpedo, sank in about 20 minutes.

As the men swung toward shore in the lifeboats the submarine approached on the surface within 300 feet as crewmen mounted the conning tower and fired on the men in the three lifeboats. Bullets shattered beams on one of the boats but failed to hit any of the men.

One of the lifeboats, in which was Captain Olof Ekstrom, First Mate Kenneth McClean, Second Mate John Young and three other men, drifted on the rocks near the Harper Shipwreck at Cambria, Pines and the men were thrown into the sea. They landed at about 9 a.m.

J. Fredrick, Cambria fire chief, Austin Wahn and David W. Chase went into the water and assisted the men to shore. The six men arrived at the San Luis Sanatorium shortly after

Captain  
Tells of



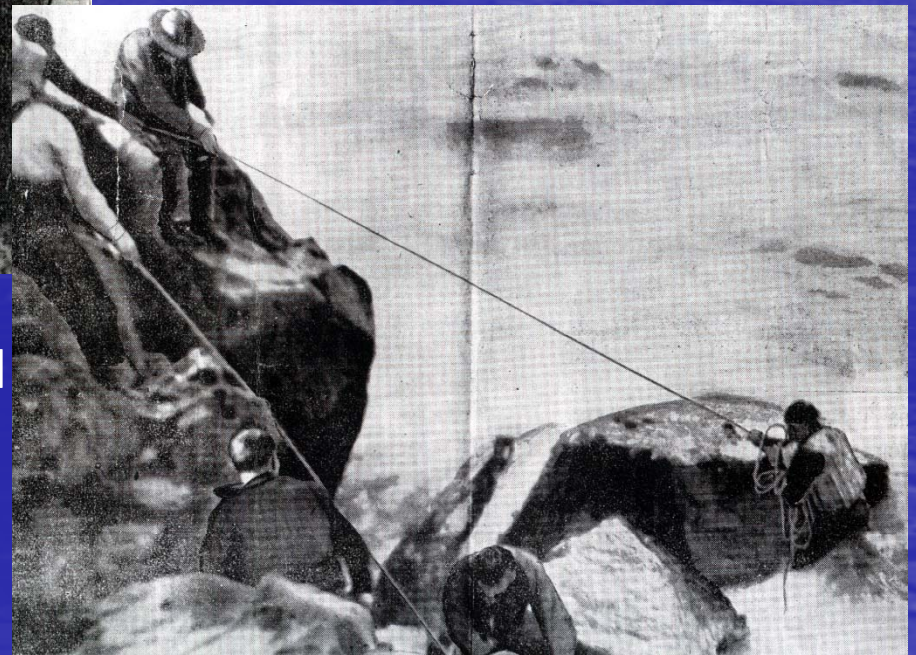


# Survivor's Beach Landing



Survivors From The Fourth Lifeboat Were Rescued At Sibley Ranch Near Cambria

Some Survivors Had To Be Pulled From The Water When The Lifeboat Was Caught In The Breakers





# Montebello Survivors

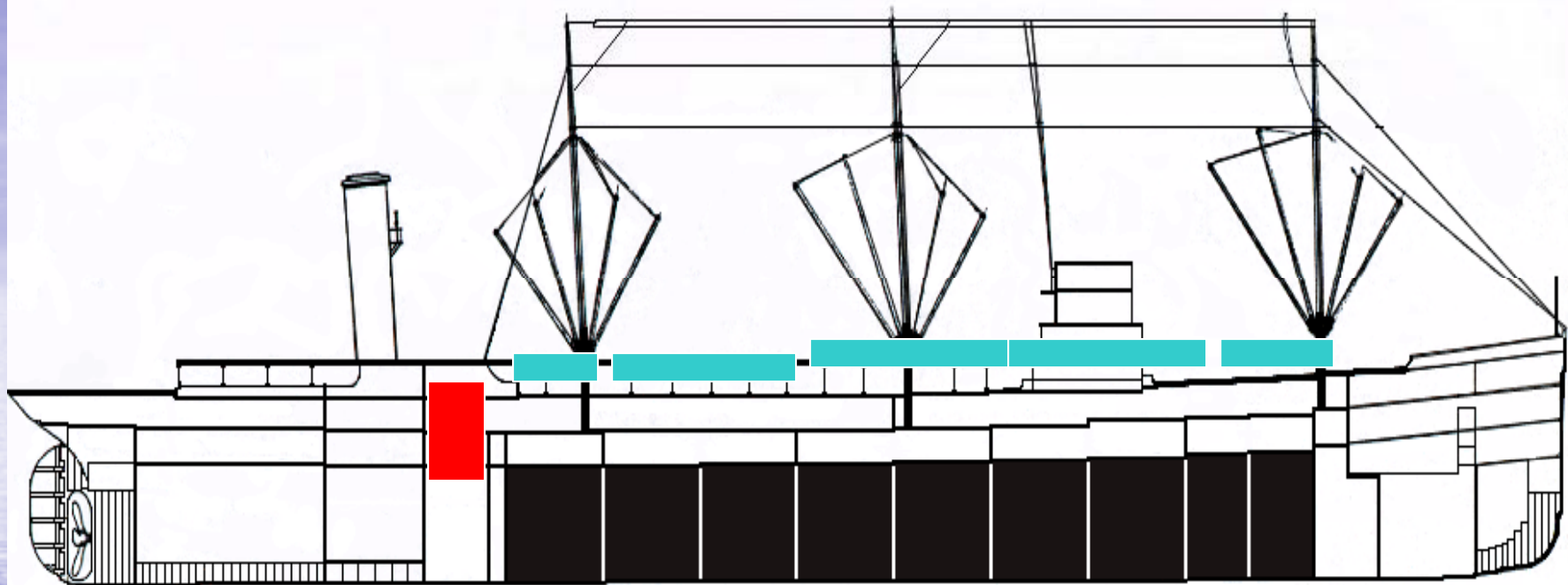




# Survivors Sea Rescue



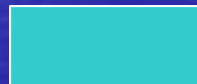
**Standard Oil Tugs Alma  
and Estero Rescued  
Survivors From Three  
Lifeboats**



Cargo space divided into 18 main tanks



10 summer tanks



2 fuel oil tanks and 2 deep ballast tanks





CONFIDENTIAL

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

REPORT ON U. S. MERCHANT TANKER WAR ACTION CASUALTY

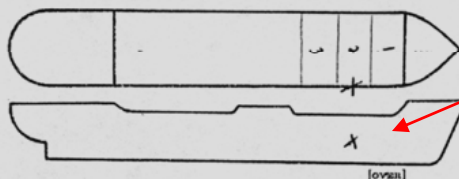
To: Commandant, U. S. Coast Guard, Washington, D. C.

Ship's MONTEBELLO Service OCEAN TANKER

Owner UNION OIL CO. OF CALIF. Operator UNION OIL CO. OF CALIFORNIA

Information furnished by MASTER & CREW Date 17 NOVEMBER, 1944

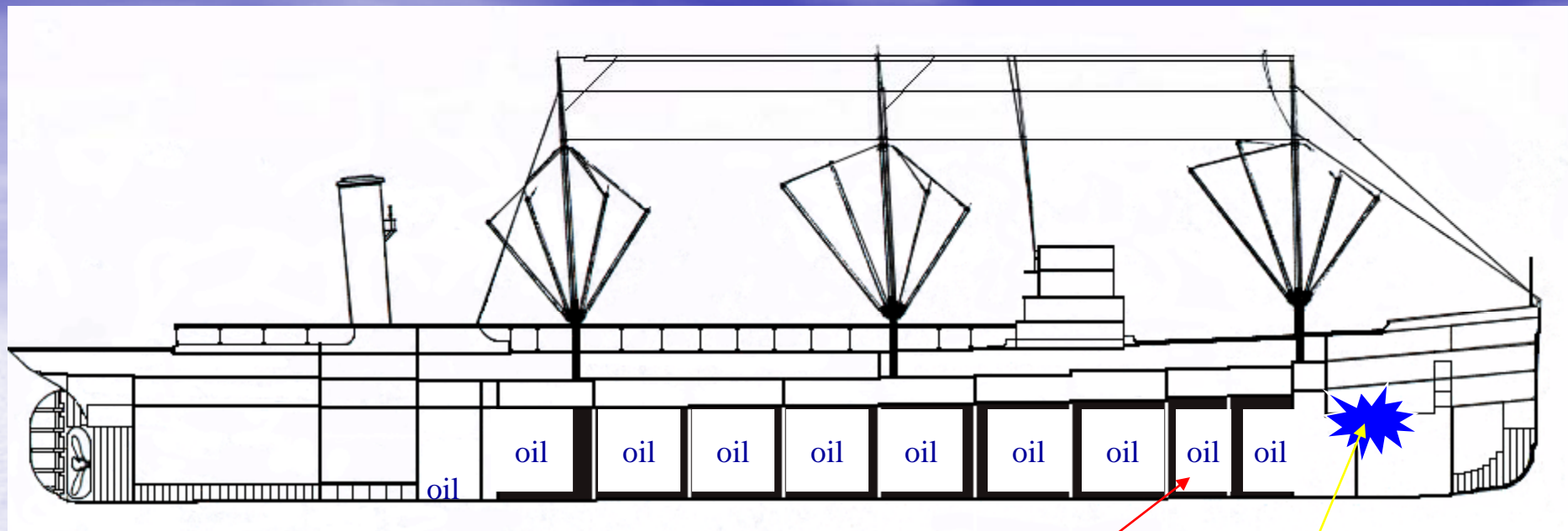
Line No.	QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
1	Year built and propulsion.....	Built <u>1921</u> Propulsion <u>STEAM</u>
2	Tonnage.....	Gross <u>8272</u> Net <u>5107</u>
3	Draft loaded (maximum allowed).....	Fwd. <u>29'10 3/4" (M)</u> Aft .....
4	Draft when attacked.....	Fwd. <u>29'10" (M)</u> Aft .....
5	D. W. T. (Emergency Coastwise L. L.).....	<u>14,000</u>
6	Cargo 42's capacity and carried.....	Capacity <u>80,000 bbls.</u> Carried <u>75,346 bbls. + 2477 (BUNKER)</u>
7	Kind of cargo or tank ballast.....	<u>CRUDE</u>
8	Was ship gas-free? (Specify).....	<u>NO - LOADED</u>
9	Voyage.....	From <u>PORT SAN LUIS, CAL.</u> To <u>VAN COUVER, B. C.</u>
10	Were routing orders followed.....	<u>YES</u>
11	Any criticism of orders.....	<u>NO</u>
12	Weather at time of attack.....	Weather <u>OVERCAST</u> Sea <u>CHOPPY</u>
13	Was enemy sighted? When.....	<u>YES; BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER ATTACK.</u>
14	Any friendly ships in sight.....	<u>NO</u>
15	Were navigation lights on.....	<u>NO</u>
16	Date and time of attack.....	Date <u>12-23-41</u> Time <u>0540</u>
17	Position.....	Latitude <u>35° 35' 30" N</u> Longitude <u>121° 16' 30" W</u>
18	Nature of attack (Give data).....	<u>TORPEDOED AND SHELLED.</u>
19	Number of hits.....	<u>1 - TORP.; SEVERAL SHELLS.</u>
20	Location of hits (Mark diagram).....	<u>1 - FOR'D; (3/4) PAR. BOD.; SEVERAL SHELL HITS - ALL OVER</u>
21	Effect of hits.....	<u>SANK SHIP</u>
22	Was ship armed? What type.....	<u>NO</u>
23	Was armament used? State result.....	<u>NO</u>
24	Was oil sprayed over ship.....	<u>NO</u>
25	Did cargo fire (Mark diagram).....	<u>NO</u>
26	Did tanks explode (Mark diagram).....	<u>NO</u>
27	Was deck ruptured.....	<u>NO</u>
28	Did ship break in two.....	<u>NO</u>
29	Was SOS sent.....	<u>YES</u>
30	Ship's speed.....	Normal <u>11.5</u> When attacked <u>11.0</u> When abandoned <u>STOP</u>
31	Time abandoned, sunk.....	Abandoned <u>0555 (15 min.)</u> Sunk <u>0645 (1 hr. 5 min.)</u>
32	Was ship reboarded.....	By whom <u>NO</u> When .....
33	Was ship brought in.....	How <u>NO</u> Approximate damage <u>SUNK</u>



Fill in this diagram to show attack hits, fires, explosions, etc.

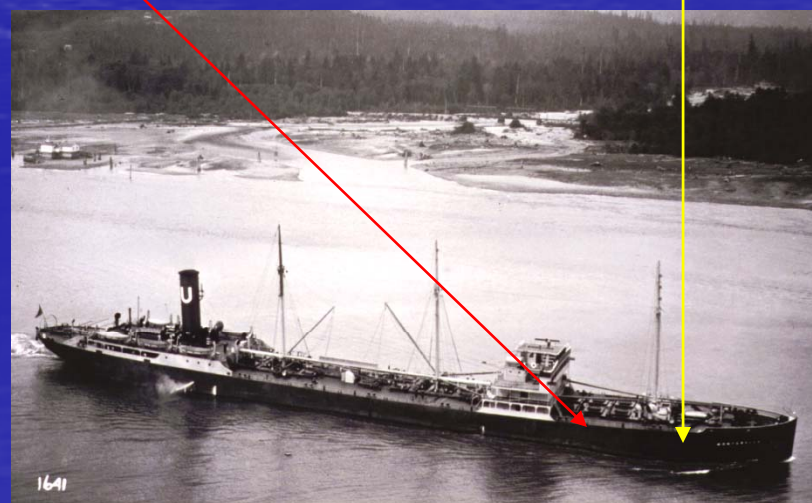


Official Crew Report  
Impact Zone



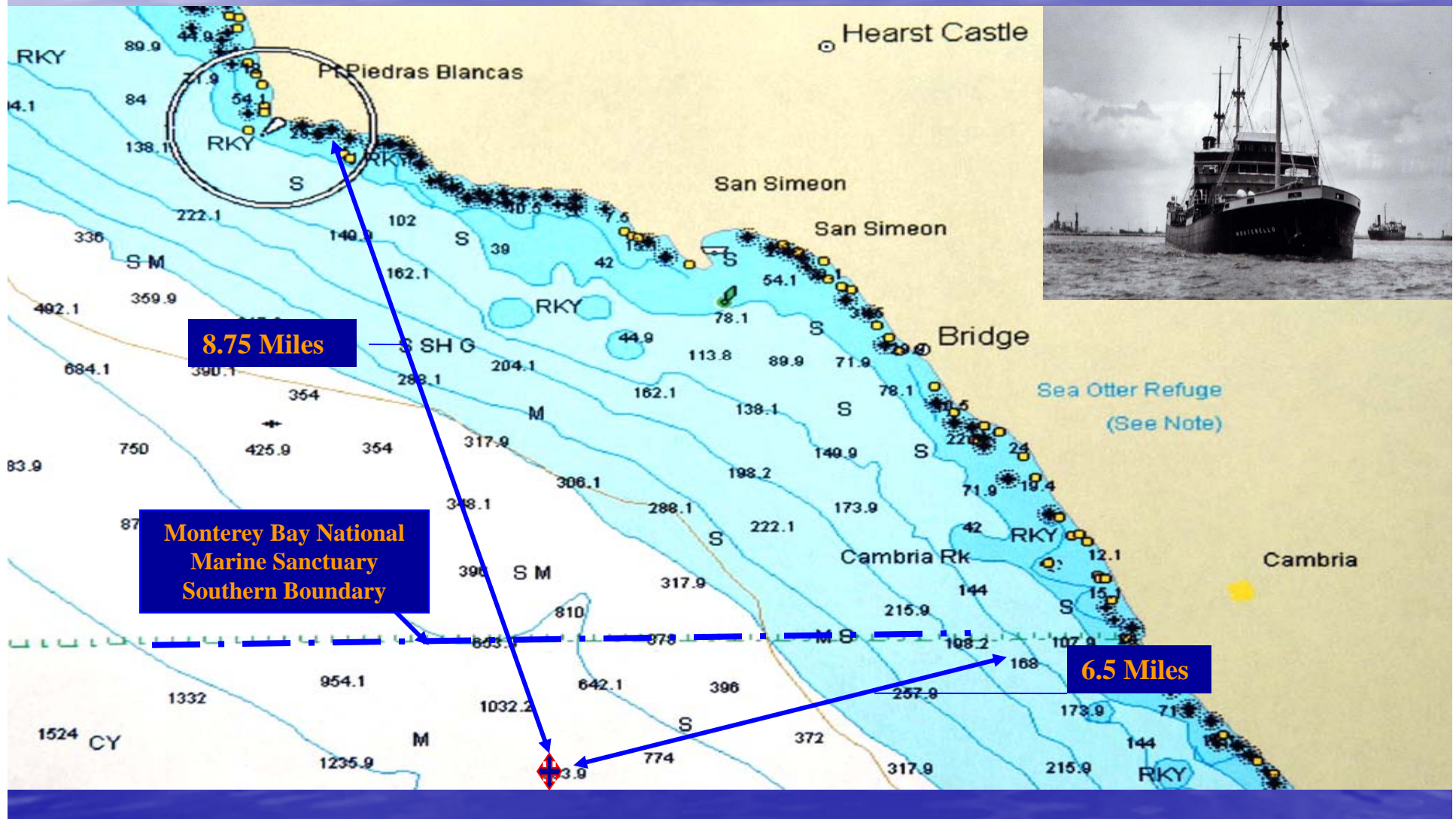
Number 2 Oil Tank  
(Crew Casualty Report)

Actual Torpedo Impact  
(*Delta* Observations)





# Montebello Position South of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary



Jack Hunter  
Principal Investigator

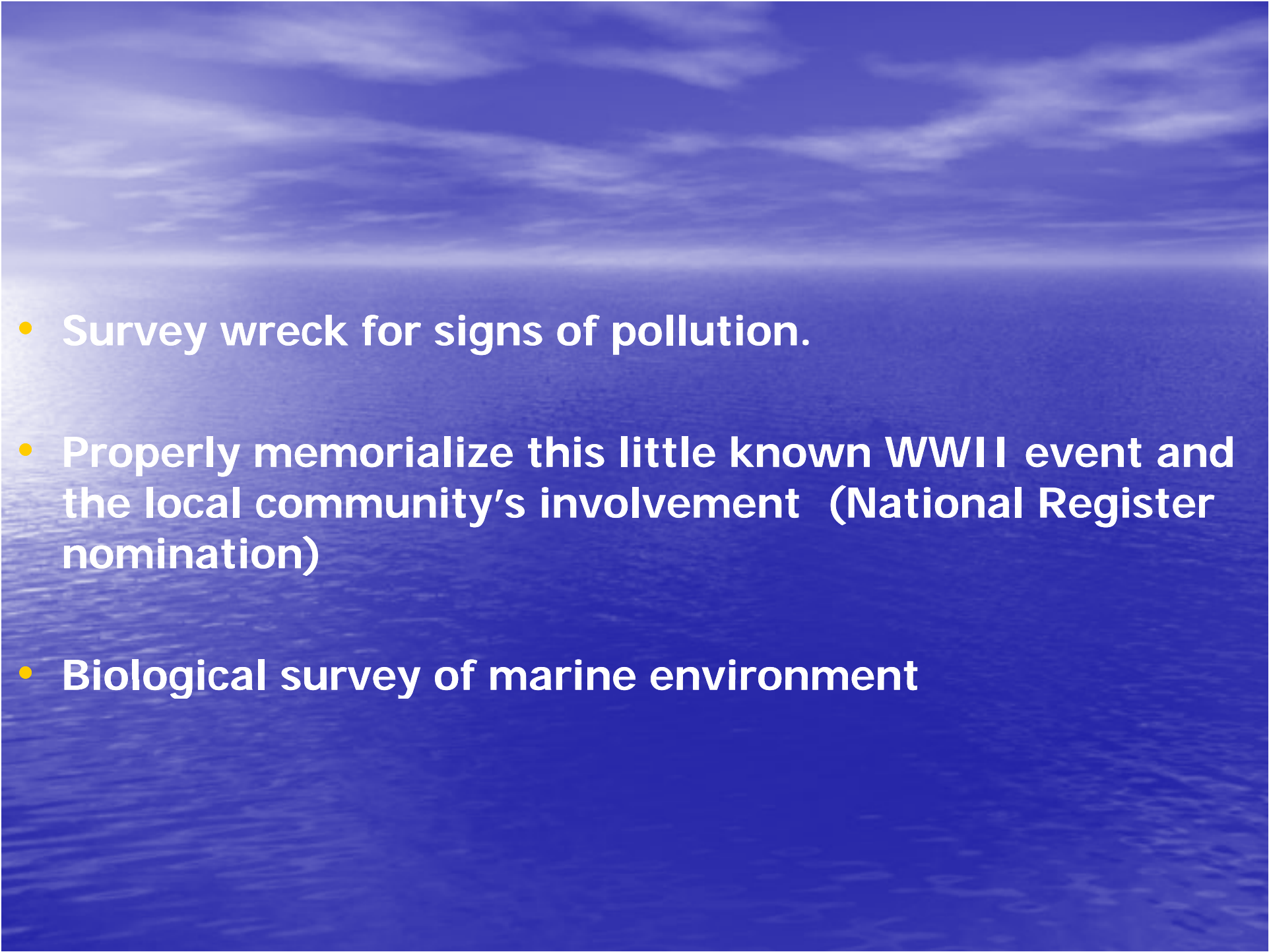


# Central Coast Maritime Museum Association



*Montebello* Rediscovery  
November 7, 1996



- 
- Survey wreck for signs of pollution.
  - Properly memorialize this little known WWII event and the local community's involvement (National Register nomination)
  - Biological survey of marine environment

# Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary 2003 Expedition



Robert Schwemmer

Jean de Marignac

Jack Hunter & John Foster

Dave Lott

Michele Roest

Erica Burton

Principal Investigator/Observer

Biologist/Observer

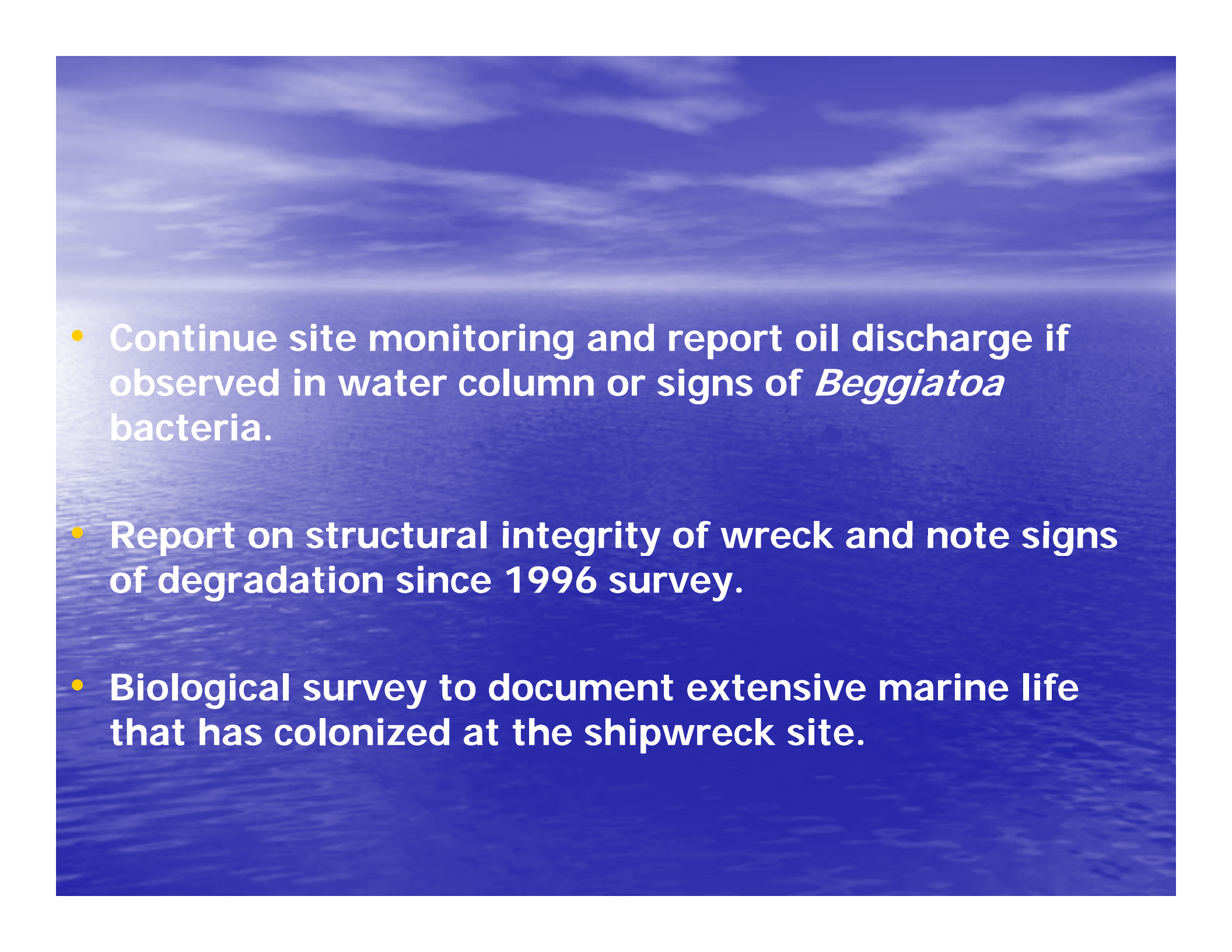
Archaeologist/Observer

GIS/Observer

Educator/Observer

Topside Support



- 
- Continue site monitoring and report oil discharge if observed in water column or signs of *Beggiatoa* bacteria.
  - Report on structural integrity of wreck and note signs of degradation since 1996 survey.
  - Biological survey to document extensive marine life that has colonized at the shipwreck site.



# **ASSESSMENT TEAM AND SUBGROUPS**



# Current Assessment Team

- Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee's Office
- California Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (DFG/OSPR)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- United States Coast Guard
- Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute
- California Department of Transportation (CalTrans)

# Subgroups

- **Physical/Site Characterization/  
Technology Subgroup:**
  - Mbari Dive
  - Manned submersible (look for leaks, visual comparison with previous dives)
  - Oil sample dive (determine if oil is on board)



## Subgroups (Cont'd)

- **Environmental Assessment Subgroup:**
  - Determine resources at risk
    - Chronic
    - Catastrophic
  - Areas of Impact

## Subgroups (Cont'd)

- **Economic Assessment Subgroup:**

Three types of impacts (from chronic catastrophic releases)

- Natural Resource Damages
- Response Cleanup costs
- Third Party Claims



# Task Force Report

- Will address results of studies completed and studies to be completed.
- Will include a discussion on funding issues.
- Will include a next step discussion.
  - Monitoring
- **Will not** address remediation options

*Anticipate completion Fall 2011*



**QUESTIONS?**