

Salvage Operations and the *Panay* Today

When the *USS Panay* sunk in 1937, it took with it nearly \$40,000 in payroll. Although the crew felt they had disposed of all sensitive documents, the possibility still existed that codes or other sensitive materials could be compromised if the Japanese chose to explore the wreck. Thus in January of 1938, the salvage tug *Saucy* and the *USS Oahu* arrived at mile 221, site of the incident, and began salvage operations.

Eight White Russian divers began their work by surveying the derelict. According to Perry, "it was clear that the *Panay* could not be salvaged. She was lying on her side in about 80 feet of water, half-covered in silt. A massive crack ran the length of her bottom. And one bomb had apparently gone all the way through her and out the bottom of the hull without ever exploding."

The divers retrieved, among other items, the safe, some possessions of the crew, the ship's bell, and 700 feet of newsreel film left aboard the ship by Arthur Menken. While the salvage effort took place, a Japanese patrol boat stood by, observing every move. It is unknown whether the Japanese searched the vessel after the *Oahu* and *Saucy* departed, although after they paid reparations for the *Panay* they did apparently request salvage rights. The request was denied.

Since that time, apparently, the wreck has not been disturbed. According to the official report, *Panay* sunk in approximately 7 to 10 fathoms, or 42 to 60 feet, of water. Given that the Yangtze is a sediment-filled river, it is highly likely the wreck is now buried under several yards of mud. As a result, the ship should be relatively intact (provided that the Chinese never bothered to dredge this area of the Yangtze).

Locating the *Panay* wreck so that it could be properly memorialized, would be an interesting exercise. According to the official account, the ship and the tankers it was escorting were lost at approximate latitude 30d 45' 30" North (30.741667) and 117d 27' 00" East (117.45000).

This area of the river can be seen in the present day using Google Maps.

<http://www.gorissen.info/Pierre/maps/googleMapLocationv3.php?lat=30.741667&lon=117.450000>

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