



"last-knowns" to locate probable resting places.

Losing a commercial fishing net is an expensive mistake, but one that can potentially pinpoint a wreck. It's an error no Thai fisherman wants to make twice, so such incidents are recorded, and for the price of a bottle of whisky and a few hours of your time, these and other marks can sometimes be garnered.

Almost exactly 60 years after *Lagarto's* launch, Jamie and Stewart were out with the crew of *mv Trident*, their newly purchased technical liveboard, on its maiden voyage.

Based on Koh Tao, a developing island off Thailand's east coast with a thriving dive and tourism industry, they were beginning their search of the Gulf of Thailand for this silent sentinel.

On the very first sweep of the area that their research had suggested, the on-board sounder located a seabed inconsistency. Eagerly Jamie and Stewart dropped 73m to investigate and, on the seabed, saw the inimitable profile of the

bow of a Balao-class submarine.

Now it was my turn to enjoy that experience. Surrounded by blue water, checking equipment, opening valves, analysing gas and double-checking plans, it was difficult not to notice the reverent hush that had fallen over those aboard the gently rocking *Trident*.

It was either due to the depths we were about to plunge into or, more likely, to the deep respect the now-quiet USS *Lagarto* commands. Profoundly respecting it as a war grave, the dive team take very seriously their role as would-be curators.

Never disturbing but simply clearing the ocean's debris at the behest of the lost submariners' families, they are gradually revealing its intact magnificence.

No one on board survived to tell the story, but from US Navy records it can be gleaned that *Lagarto* suffered a fatal depth charge while attacking a convoy guarded by the fiercely protective Japanese destroyer *Hatsutaka*. The USS *Baya* was *Lagarto's* partner in the attack and was unable to re-establish contact, so her demise was simply assumed.

Descending the line surrounded by schooling jacks, my calmness was transformed quickly to awe as I caught sight

Clockwise from top left:

The *Lagarto's* conning tower; *mv Trident's* dive crew; star-spangled memorial flag; Stewart Oehl and Jamie Macleod head back to the wreck they discovered.

Below: The *Lagarto* in Chicago, on the inland section of her maiden voyage in 1944.

