



of the periscope shears and conning tower poking through the thermocline. It was a sight I'll never forget.

Now draped in a star-spangled banner, a commemorative gift from the relatives of Signalman First Class William T Mabin, this protrusion will entice you down.

Limited bottom time at this depth means that USS *Lagarto* is best not rushed but explored over a few dives. It deserves your time and consideration.

The conning tower and bridge are so uncannily intact. Complete with target data transmitter, telegraph and target sight, it's difficult not to position yourself behind these instruments and, in the silence, imagine yourself at battle stations.

A FEW MORE FIN-KICKS towards the bow will reveal the eerily silent guns that identified the wreck beyond doubt as *Lagarto*. Their spectral silhouettes are shrouded in lost fishing nets.

Drop over to the port side and the submarine's fatal wound is revealed. Metal torn like paper indicates the fury of her destruction. A reverential pause at the sealed escape hatch again gives the diver cause to consider.

You can hardly fail to notice the position of the dive planes and the hard-to-port rudder, indicating that *Lagarto* was in an evasive dive manoeuvre at the

last. Towards the bow, torpedo tube four's door is open, proving that a torpedo was fired in the final moments and that she went down fighting – a source of pride among the families of those lost.

Recent exploration by roving camera has concluded that the inner torpedo door was closed, leading to the belief that the tomb was and is fully sealed.

Standing at the foot of the bow is a must for any wreck diver, but I swear that no other wreck will have the same impact on your memory as this, because the distinctive outline is awesome, and the submerge holes let through an eerie light.

Pass by on the starboard side, and you will notice a heavily encrusted anchor.

A trip to the propellers will leave you dazzled by their sheer size and potential power. They dwarf even the tallest diver.

On the way there I noticed that the teak decking had succumbed to the ocean's destructiveness, revealing a mass of snaking cables, though the guns were still securely mounted.

The US Navy held an official rendezvous over the site and added a memorial plaque to the submarine before leaving the wreck, with no plans to salvage, as a monument to battles past. Dive trips are limited, but for any technical diver and wreck enthusiast this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. **CK**

Above: Torpedo tube on the *Lagarto*.
Right: This memorial plaque was laid by the US Navy.



FACTFILE

FLIGHTS ▶ Fly from the UK via Bangkok to Koh Tao's neighbouring island of Koh Samui and take a short boat ride.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▶ *Trident* is an exploratory deep wreck team, www.techthailand.com. It is based in Koh Tao, which offers accommodation ranging from 5* hotels to beach huts. *Lagarto* apart, Koh Tao diving attractions range from titan triggerfish to reef sharks, with some whale shark sightings.

WHEN TO GO ▶ You can dive year-round but the best diving is from March-October. The monsoon season begins in November. Water temperature is 24-28°C.

LANGUAGE ▶ Thai but English widely spoken.

MONEY ▶ Baht.

PRICES ▶ A technical-diving day-trip aboard *Trident* costs around £130 a day.

FURTHER INFORMATION ▶ 020 7499 7679, www.tourismthailand.org

