

Friday 9th and Saturday 10th May

We spent quite some time checking in the huge amount of luggage, so after clearing customs we have to go to the airplane straightaway. It will take off for Kuala Lumpur at 12.00 o'clock. Then a short flight to our destination Kuching. At five to twelve Roy, Joop and Dick have not boarded yet, and we are getting a bit nervous. A minute later they arrive on board, in a hurry - apparently they had been delayed due to customs problems. Fortunately the doors can be closed right on time and we taxi to the runway for a smooth flight of over twelve hours. The plane is only half full and we have lots of space. We do not sleep much on board, we have a day flight and biological clocks are not set to sleep on command.

We arrive three minutes ahead of schedule at KL, where we take the state-of-the-art maglev line from one terminal to the other to get the new boarding passes, and back. The flight to Kuching takes off at 8.00 o'clock, again almost empty. If only Malaysian Airlines can go on like this!

We make a quick phone call home, and hear that RTL News had a good and beautiful news-item about our expedition, and that the newspaper article in De Telegraaf, in which Hans Besançon, Klaas en Katja were interviewed last week, is very good as well. We would have preferred to get publicity only on arrival after success, but now that the expedition is in the news anyway we want to control the news supply as much as possible.

On arrival at Kuching International Airport someone is waiting with a notice "Mr. Klaas". He has only one van. He looks terrified and makes frantic phone calls for assistance when he sees our vast amount of luggage. Half an hour later a second van arrives. We load it with our chests, bags, backpacks and Katja's suitcase.

The van takes a scenic route along wildly grown forests to the village from where we will sail. [name of the village] is a typically Asian fishing village with a long jetty and a family restaurant, and a wonderful Chinese temple on the hill. Under the awning of the restaurant, enjoying a cold Coke and a soft sea breeze, we all recover from the long journey.

We have to wait for the Mata Ikan; the crew must first be checked for SARS by the port authorities - the ship comes from Singapore and that is "suspect", of course. In the meantime we are offered a more than excellent meal with rice, jungle grass, jungle deer, fresh fish, lobster and sort of an oyster pancake. Delicious! We are all looking forward tremendously to almost two weeks of Indian food.

When the Mata Ikan finally arrives the tide has gone out and she has to anchor out at sea. Dinghies sail to and fro to transfer luggage and crew, and we meet the crew.

On board the territories are marked - the question who sleeps in which berth and who sleeps on deck is, of course, crucial - and the diving equipment is put together.

As it is too late already to set out we spend the night in port. The first meal on board - nasi kuning - tastes delicious. That bodes very well! After the meal everyone collapses and already at half past eight we go to our berths.

Six people have gone to sleep on deck in the open air, but at 1 o'clock they are forced inside by an enormous tropical downpour. Everything has gone wet! Only Roy and Simon are not deterred and stay on deck. At 3 o'clock anchor is hoisted noisily and we set out for our first diving location.

Sunday 11th May 2003

The first night after the flight some of us have slept very little - still jet-lagged -, others wake up at 8.30 only to find that the Mata Ikan is already far out at sea. The sea is calm. There are a few small islands and a few fishing boats around us. Little sunshine, so perfect conditions for our first dive.

With the side-scan sonar we find the Katori Maru, a cargo ship torpedoed by the K-XIV. On sonar you can see it very nicely. Michael Lim makes the first dive to attach an anchor line to the bow and then everybody goes into the water. For Katja the very first dive in open water in her life!

Klaas and Katja dive together under the watchful eye of cameraman John, Sonja and Roy stay with Jessica and Claire, Dick and Joop are a buddy pair, and Simon dives all over the place and takes pictures. Immediately under water you can see the Katori Maru. We descend down the anchor line to the first structure near the bow of the ship. There are many shoals of fish and visibility is pretty good. Immediately after entering the water Katja has lost her weight belt, which is later brought to the surface by Klaas. Katori Maru has broken into two pieces as a result of the torpedo impact at about one third from the bow. The pieces lie apart in an angle of about 45 degrees.

Sonja, Roy, Jessica en Claire swim round the bow. A very nice dive, and although Jessica and Claire have not dived for a couple of years they have everything perfectly under control. The wreck is covered with corals and there are lots of fish. Katja had problems with clearing - she was even bleeding from her nose - but she has been 10m deep nevertheless. A good first dive!

The rest of the team has had a nice dive too and surfaces with great stories.

The crew of the Mata Ikan also goes down and comes back with a couple of nice lobsters, an oyster and a framework and an oil stove of the Katori Maru. These are professionally cleaned by Roy with his ingenious hammer and sickle construction.

The cook has made a delicious soup and daging smoor so it's a feast. After lunch a short rest and then back down!

This time Simon and Sonja take Jessica and Claire back to the deep, now to check the stern. Simon takes Jessica to the first deck, Sonja and Claire swim over it. Another nice dive!

Katja goes to 15.8 meters down this time, despite significant clearing problems. A fantastic depth for a second dive!

After everyone has surfaced anchor is hoisted. We sail a short distance and arrive at the wreck of an unknown Japanese ship. Simon goes down with Jessica and Claire. Many, including Sonja and Katja, let the opportunity slip and continue trying to recover from their jetlags.

This dive is not made until sunset, so we carry torches in case we surface in the dark, and, of course, to be able to see more colours underwater. Those little yellow flowers, that we have seen before, turn out to have a wonderful red background. Most corals actually turn out to be red, but, without torches, that is not visible because of the filtering of colour underwater.

That night everyone is exhausted and goes to sleep early.

Monday 12th May

The first real search-day!

We start looking at the first possible position, in a spiral pattern, but we abandon this plan fairly quickly because it appears too difficult to maintain because the boat drifts too much. We change to a linear search pattern, which could contain two wrecks - according to our data: the Chesterton (a ship loaded with shrimps on its way from Malaysia to Japan in 1979; it made water and sank) and a possible, but quite unlikely, location of K-XVI. Now the really long wait and staring at screens and paper rolls begins. We have two side-scan sonars (tow fishes) in the water, one that prints on thermal paper and one that depicts an electronic signal on a laptop computer. In front, on the bridge, a front-scan sonar is active.

We find nothing, not even the Chesterton. This means that we can notify the port authorities that their maps are incorrect. And where it is ... remains a mystery. In the afternoon, the oldest sonar-printers must cool down, and so do we. The boat is stopped, and armed with fins, snorkel and goggles, we take a refreshing dip in the water to have a swim.

Two small sharks are swimming under the boat. Later they turn out to be Rumora, or sucking fish, which "vacuum clean" sharks. And a third appears! Simon is a hero when it comes to diving without equipment - the fish are very curious about this strange creature at a depth of 8 meters and approach within six feet of him. Brilliant! Katja suddenly sees a silver sea snake at the stern. He keeps out of reach and winds his way down. What a beautiful animal that was!

After about half an hour we surface and we appear to have been driven away by the current. We finish part of our search plan, but when we find nothing at the suspected location of K-XVI we set sail to where John and Michael found pieces of steel last year. The pieces are marked with a white buoy. Not so easy to find, but after peering into the sun a lot, we find it. We sail around it to give the sonar the opportunity to pick up some signals, but only the front-scan sonar picks up a signal - and just some flat pieces on the bottom. Yet John and Michael go down, armed with video equipment and torches.

We expected that they would only make a 4 minute touch-and-go because of the depth of over 46 meters, but they stay away quite long ... have they found something interesting? By now it is dusk, and lamps are lit on the boat and near the cameraman. At last we see two pairs of bubbles coming up and shortly after that we see the light from their torches. When they finally surface after about 35 minutes, we cannot wait to hear their news. Klaas has made video recordings and we sit down in front of the super deluxe DVD home cinema video tower full of anticipation. Klaas rewinds his VCR and we enjoy some seconds ... the image of Michael's deco stop. Klaas turned off the camera when he went down and turned it on when he surfaced. Unfortunately, Klaas! He tells us that there was not much to see anyway, there were really just some pieces of steel. In a few pieces you might be able to detect the saw-tooth pattern of the bow of the K16, but this is so uncertain. Even if the boat had fallen apart completely by a violent explosion in the torpedo room, a recognizable piece of the ship would still be left.

We decide to leave it at that, possibly later if we find nothing we can return here to get more detailed images.

First we enjoy a good supper again! The cook has made rice, fried squid, chicken and spicy cabbage. It is delicious again!

In the evening we search a little more, but find nothing. We anchor and go to sleep.

Tuesday 13th May 2003

The sea was pretty rough last night and many have slept badly through the combination of pitching and rolling. The people on deck were forced to spend the night in the cramped berths because of the rain for the third night in a row, except of course Roy again - who insists on staying on deck. The family Boonstra, however, has had a good night's sleep. The equipment is prepared and we start searching at around half past nine.

Nixon and Michael recently told us about the Mighty Sea. Finding what you want depends on its favour.

It is so common that what you're looking for is at a completely different position from where you think - actually, many wrecks have been found only after years of searching just by pure chance. "The sea itself determines when it allows one of its secrets to be revealed," says Michael. A sacrifice can appease her and perhaps speed success. However, you can enforce nothing.

Katja, Jessica and Claire decide to give an offering to the sea, consisting of precious little personal things. We ask the cook to cut open a coconut and make a paper garland - just three little toddlers who are crafting diligently.

By half past ten, everyone is called on deck and Katja speaks a few beautiful words for the crew of K16, the expedition team and the crew of the Mata Ikan. Katja puts the pocket knife that had once belonged to her mother into the coconut, Claire a keychain that means a lot to her, showing "gratitude" and her name in rhinestones, and Jessica her necklace. The crew sings a song in Bahasa Indonesia and from the lift cage Katja, Jessica and Claire lay the filled coconut in the water, accompanied by some fruit.

Thus what is actually meant as a humorous action becomes a nice little ceremony, which I hope will make the gods of the sea favourably inclined! In any case, it has been recorded by at least eight cameras, so our children are sure to see it ... As a matter of fact, each movement we make is recorded not only by professional cameraman John, but also by Katja with her video camera, or by Roy with his digital camera, or Claire, or Simon or Michael, or ...

Katja suddenly remembers that you should never offer something sharp, because it might hurt the gods. So the pocket knife was not a good idea! Dick and Sonja offer advice: if you throw a penny in everything will be fine!

On the upper deck Dick acts as a full-time masseur. All stress and stiff shoulders caused by small and hard mattresses and too short nights is expertly squeezed away. Albeit with few beatific expressions on the faces of the patients - the treatment is rough. But after the massage everyone feels nimble again.

We spend the rest of the afternoon and evening hanging out, reading a book, sleeping, or playing at cards ...

The sky looks so ominous that only Roy is so heroic as to venture a new on-deck sleeping attempt. If only things are a bit quiet tonight ...

Wednesday 14th May 2003

Claire got up at 5 to make a phone call to the Netherlands. When she came up on deck, she found a lot of stressed out and soaked crew members, who were desperately trying to get the dinghy, which had been sunk by a huge storm, up again. Only after many frantic attempts and after deployment of the crane they manage to get the thing up. But with three large cracks it is beyond repair. The outboard engine is completely broken.

During the rescue attempt dolphins frolicking around the boat try to encourage the crew, but they are still dismayed.

How can we continue our search? A dinghy is necessary to pick up divers that have drifted away. A big setback, which unfortunately will not be the last.

The storm is huge and at dawn most of the team stay in bed, a bucket close at hand. Dick has the best sea legs of everyone and helps with bringing biscuits, toast and coffee to the berths. Simon thinks that his stomach can deal with simultaneously cutting pieces of rubber in an attempt to repair the dinghy, to read the sonar and to weather the storm. But after fifteen minutes he hangs over the railing to deliver the first portion of fish food of that day ...

We try to find calmer waters with the Mata Ikan, but the road towards them is long and full of pitching, rolling and other fairground movements. Lying flat in the berths is the best position for most of us. And we can think about what we would take should we be shipwrecked.

In the afternoon we see a Thai fishing boat, which is really frightened when it sees us approaching - it should not be in Malaysian waters at all. As the dinghy cannot be used, we must try to make contact otherwise. It cannot be done by radio, so we write a text on a piece of paper and show that we are not the Coast Guard.

The sea is still moving a lot, so it takes a lot of steering skills to come closer, especially since the fishing boat drags a net behind it.

As we get closer and Michael's street-Thai can be better heard by the Thai crew, more men and even two dogs come on deck and they don't seem to be frightened any longer. When it becomes clear that our intentions are good the first smiles appear on their faces. The fishing boat has been here for 120 days and has found no obstacles in this area. On the one hand this is a disappointment, but on the other hand it is a relief that we have not lost a day of searching, despite the storm - this was the area we wanted to search today. To show them our gratitude we give them a coca cola pack, and they give us a fresh octopus in return. Guess what we will eat tonight!

On this news we decide to leave and to sail to a position closer to the coast.

By the evening we pass a possible wreck, where we might make a night dive.

Again, we find no wreck, but we do find a reef. We go on looking for a buoy a while, but in the end we decide to anchor at the reef. After a dinner with - indeed - fresh-baked octopus we prepare the equipment for a night dive, Claire's first! The buddy pairs are formed and there is quite some hustle and bustle on the deck.

But even before we have put on our diving suits the wind suddenly picks up and within a few seconds there is a downpour. We get all wet and soaked and it looks like we really have dived ...

Inside a particularly bad fight movie is shown, so the mood remains relaxed. We can put up with it ...

Meanwhile, the storm increases and everything inside slides hopelessly back and forth. A few videotapes are damaged and we must hold on tightly to avoid sliding off the benches.

Even Roy, the only one who slept outside the last few nights, can no longer remain on deck. It's just too dangerous.

Thursday 15th May 2003

We dropped anchor somewhere tonight, but the sea was so rough that we kept slipping off the anchor all the time. Meanwhile, everyone wondered whether our boat would survive this, considering how hard she bounced and pounded on the waves.

When the crew got signals from a freighter in the middle of the night that a big typhoon was very close, we got out of harm's way as quickly as we could. Full speed ahead, back to port!

Hardly anybody had a real breakfast, just some biscuits and toast. Luckily Katja had stocked them in large quantities! But most of us could not get a bite in, fearing it might come out just as quickly - and hanging overboard is extremely dangerous. The noses get greener, the faces paler and puffiness around the eyes got bigger.

Around ten o'clock we are back in quiet waters, along with a whole bunch of other frightened fishing boats. We are looking for a place where we can get fresh water - so we can at least have a shower more often - and from where we can make a trip ashore. The container port is particularly well suited, and very quiet because of a holiday.

A good time for some group photos with the various sponsored pieces of clothing and equipment. The pale faces have got refreshed a bit, and we put on our best smile. And then, off we go in a cramped van to Kuching!

We really need some relaxation, after the past days in which we have been able to do very little except hanging around and being seasick - and we yearn for a nice piece of beef or creamy ice cream. Although we all thought we could easily live off rice three times a day for two weeks, it turns out that we, with our varied Dutch eating habits, are getting tired of fish, rice and cabbage with cucumber every day. So we are quite ready for a distraction! We are dropped off at - yes - the McDonald's and after getting some Ringgits from the ATM we divide up into small groups and go to Kuching's nicest part: the Riverbank. A nice promenade along the Sarawak River with some eateries, an internet cafe to check the latest weather report, adequate GSM coverage for some calls home and of course numerous markets with fresh vegetables or chicken, and lots of shops with fake brand stuff and the usual souvenirs.

Roy is more than adept at bargaining and manages to get a set of video tapes for Katja at a ridiculously low price. Jessica and Claire cannot control himself and buy a few nice bags. Klaas and Sonja finally have some time for themselves alone; Joop and Dick walk together, probably making nefarious plans.

At 17.30 we were expected back in front of the McDonalds - so that was in the McD. You should have seen their faces when we sank our teeth in a juicy Big Mac or cheeseburger!! Especially Roy (prefers not to eat fish, so he hasn't had it his way these last days) is totally delighted and proudly has his picture taken next to the big yellow M.

In the van back to the harbour it is clear that this trip ashore has been good for morale. Everyone has completely recovered and we look forward to the last few days with confidence.

The strict security officer of the port office looks very dubious when our driver reports that he is bringing back divers of the Mata Ikan - the only people he could see were Billian, Katja and Claire. "Strange commercial divers these days ..."

Back on the boat our cook dishes up a delicious evening meal. But our stomachs, still filled with French fries, hamburgers and ice cream sundae are a little less hungry this time.

We enjoy a quiet evening in the harbour, which is only disturbed by the news, coming from the container ship lying next to us, that a big freighter has sunk that night just north of where we were in the storm. Imagine, our boat is perhaps as long as the freighter is wide. Strange idea when you consider what could have happened if the typhoon had passed a little more to the south.

Friday 16th May 2003

The water was calm in the harbour, and it did not rain last night. So finally a good night's sleep!

Around 3 in the morning we set off as usual, towards the position where we had dived on the stack of metal plates before. Our aim is to make good video recordings for identification and to take some steel samples for metallurgical research in The Netherlands.

The people on deck are woken up by the sun burning in their faces - that's a good sign! Soon, everyone is on the deck in their swimsuits and sunscreen is put on lavishly. This sunny gift is perhaps a good omen.

On our way we meet another fishing boat - again no one is visible on deck initially - and the dinghy goes towards them (the dinghy has been repaired by Simon [using Katja's hair dryer, it must be said]). The dinghy stays afloat (cheers, Simon!), and Michael comes back with coordinates of an obstacle where they have lost their nets, and again a bag full of octopus and crab. The dinghy goes back again to the fishing boat with cigarettes to thank the fishermen.

The coordinates of the obstacle are very close to where we had already searched, but a little more to the south. Would we be lucky this time?? We are hopeful again, maybe today is just the right day. After all it is the 16th!

But we stick to our initial plan to dive on the pieces of metal. On our way to them we see a white buoy, however, exactly like the one that marked the other locations, more or less close to where the "unknown wreck" might be. Excitement galore! Roy and Joop quickly change into their diving suits and promise to find a submarine at the end of the line that is attached to the buoy. Less than two minutes later, though, they surface again - in their hands is the buoy and a big palm leaf ... What a huge disappointment! Martin explains that it is very common for fishermen to throw "buoys" of packing material into the sea attached to a barrel of fish waste, a palm leaf or something else that attracts fish. A smart trick of the fishermen, but a disappointment for us. The next days we would pull some more buoys from the water, until we learnt to tell "real" buoys from fake buoys and ignored them.

We drop anchor about half past two in the afternoon near the white buoy and the red buoy that we added last time, near the metal plates that Klaas visited last year, and that we visited two days ago. The technical divers, in buddy pairs and armed with video cameras, dive to the plates that were found at about 46 to 48 meters (difference is due to tidal flow).

Sonja, Dick, Jessica and Claire also take a dip here and plan a dive of a half hour to 10 meters. We agree to stay close together because of the current and poor visibility. We paddle towards the buoy, and notice how strong the current is. Not easy! Near the buoy Sonja gives the signal "down"; under water the paddling is often easier. Dick, Jessica and Claire, however, go down too slowly, and soon they cannot see Sonja anymore. We make the mistake of just going on and not surfacing after a minute to locate Sonja again. With great difficulty we stay at 10 meters for 10 minutes, and then decide we had better surface again. The dinghy has been hanging over us for a while and only after being towed back to

the Mata Ikan do we realize that people on board have worried a lot about us. Another valuable lesson learned about current, agreements and staying together.

Our experienced divers, too, have problems dealing with the current and the poor visibility and nearly all buddy pairs or trios lose touch with each other. Simon was to dive with Klaas and Michael, but while making video recordings of the two other divers, at some distance from the line, he gets into problems with his fin and floats away. He lands on the sandy seafloor, and after swimming a few yards he suddenly finds a clearly man-made piece of steel. In his words a heart-shaped square - whatever that may be. Later in the video we see something with a round shape that might be part of a rudder trim!

A few yards further on he suddenly sees a vertical object which he recognizes as a short structure, perhaps of a ship, topped with a structure that stands upright in the current, with many layers of netting wrapped around it. Something that stays upright in the current must contain a very strong structure inside! On the video we see a dark straight thin shape - who knows the periscope! We are very excited about this twist of fate.

Roy was to dive with Joop, but they lose each other soon and Roy drifts off, only to find a large piece of steel with a longitudinal curve. This could be a part of the hull ...

Klaas and Michael find an anchor and a typical course of the anchor chain: not directly into the chain room, but guided along a guide plate over a distance. Later on deck, when we study the drawings of the K-XVI, we see this again. This could also be a very clear indication!

So we're all very excited and impressed. It looks really as if the K-XVI has completely fallen apart when it exploded - at least if this is K-XVI..

Admittedly, we are very close to the Chesterton, but it is very unlikely that a shrimp boat which made water in 1979 and sank, has fallen apart like that. We know that the K-XVI was hit by at least one torpedo.

The "only" thing left is to determine if it is a submarine, and then we know for sure.

In any case, this is a beautiful part of the sea, and Katja is happy that this is so far away from land. Should this really be our submarine, then at least the wreck will not be disturbed by hordes of divers.

We call The Netherlands and we ask the Navy to figure out the diameter of the periscope, the size of the anchor and its links, and to do some other precise measurements. Those whom we hope to speak to are in a meeting - so we will wait.

At night it looks like a storm rises, but it remains relatively quiet with only some slight swell.

Saturday 17th May 2003

Today again several dives. Klaas and Michael go down together, then Roy and Joe, and Martin with Simon.

The large piece of steel is found again, Roy estimates 12 by 4 meters. Everywhere you see small pieces of steel. Something really violent must have happened here!

Today is a fantastic sunny day and we, pale faces, work hard on our tourist tan. It is very hot on deck and for a cooling down Jessica and Claire take a fresh leap into the water to have a swim. The current is enormous, so we must hold on firmly to the life-buoy, and it takes us much time - even with fins - to swim back the distance that we drift off in a short time.

Suddenly, there is considerable turmoil on board - Klaas has sent up a yellow buoy. We had agreed that this meant "problems", whereas a red buoy indicated the (drifting) decompression location. The rope of our round life-buoy is wrapped around the screw and it must be released immediately. Gone is the dinghy!

It feels very frustrating to be on the boat, to see that much further on something is wrong, and you cannot do anything.

In the meantime, Roy and Joop are getting ready for their dive, and when they count the buoys it turns out that Roy has two red buoys. So that means that Klaas has just yellow ones! So there is probably no problem, he only had a yellow buoy to let go. Phew, thank goodness.

Joop and Roy go into the water and let themselves drift towards the red buoy, to which the big piece of steel is attached. Joop reaches the buoy, but Roy misses it because he is drifted off by the strong current. Well, there he goes ... The dinghy is still far away at sea near the - long - drifting decompression stop of Klaas and Simon. To remain visible Roy holds up a red buoy and is getting smaller. Fortunately, the sea is quite smooth today.

We decide to pick up Roy with the Mata Ikan, and the captain signals to Joop that he may release the buoy and drift off. "Just picking up" is easier said than done, because the anchor isn't hoisted easily - so we noticed in recent days.

There is fierce turning and hammering on the anchor chain, which only gradually comes up. Meanwhile, Roy has released his second buoy, for us a sign that he is starting to get worried. Later it appeared that he did this mainly to be better visible for us, and while playing with the chains he could kill the long time of waiting - and try to keep the sun off his unprotected bald head with the buoys.

The anchor comes up painfully slowly, and the small specks on the horizon drift off farther and farther. Finally, the Mata Ikan has hoisted anchor and we can pick up Joop. Klaas and Simon have also surfaced and are sitting in the dinghy which also takes Roy on its way back. Fortunately, everyone is back safely!

Unfortunately, only few of the things we set out to do have been completed due to the poor conditions under water. Michael has swum some rounds with his underwater scooter, and he says that he has seen a big dark object just outside his circle - perhaps the tower covered in nets?

Since we have hoisted anchor anyway we look at two other coordinates close by, but we find nothing and we go back to our metal plates place where we have gained very promising results.

In the meantime, we are called by the Navy, who have been able to find out the exact size of the periscope and the links of the anchor. Surely a relief to know that they are prepared to provide us with background support even at the weekend !

It takes a lot of time to find back the right place. Considering how much effort it takes to find the exact diving location even of known coordinates, it's actually a miracle that we have been able to find this place at all - so much further away from the location that was originally specified as the place of the torpedo impact.

All of a sudden "Simon's tower" appears on the front-scan sonar rising from the seafloor. We anchor at the tower and before long Roy and Joe, and Michael and Martin go down again.

Roy and Joop achieve no results, but Michael and Martin have found the tower back.
[What about anchoring??]

At 18 pm at night Klaas and Simon go down again, with a deco tank which is hung on the trapeze. The aim is to disentangle the alleged periscope from the tangle of nets. Alleged, because however much they cut, and how clearly we saw a pipe in the nets on video, there seems nothing to be. What a huge disappointment. This could really have been the

key to identification, and now it just appears to be a roll of nets that has probably fallen off a ship. The "structure" that we had seen before on the seafloor turns out to be only rock. The tower is held up by the fishing net buoys ...

So no useful result all day. Too bad, but perhaps the last dives in the morning will make a breakthrough.

In the evening, after another meal of fish, rice and vegetables, we vent some frustration. Like a bunch of drunks (no drop of alcohol on board ...) Katja, Roy, Joe, Simon, John, Michael and Claire sing wildly and out of tune to bad karaoke CDs. If we are in Asia, why not party the Asian way? It looks like a mixed bag of entertainment! The only people who can sing in tune are Joop and especially Michael, the rest do their best but it is to no avail. Unfortunately, this merry-making is recorded by three cameras. We are certainly going to regret this. ... Klaas, Sonja and Dick take precautions to keep far from this all and heave a sigh of relief when we say that we have changed to some more appropriate activities ... "Fine, so we can put off the generator". [the generator is on deck and makes a substantial amount of noise. Every time it is switched off a deep silence descends on the ship, and all shoulders are lowered and ten mouths sigh a deep "ahhhhhh".] The rest of the evening is quiet and so is the sea, and we hope that we will find some important stuff for identification in the morning, and go to bed.

Sunday 18th May 2003

By half past six everyone gets up, because this morning the three diving teams must go down as early as possible. For with so many deco dives in recent days we should take our return flight into account. Already tomorrow night at 20h45 we will fly! Simon and Joop continue their search for the thing that might be a rudder trim, Roy and Klaas have the task to identify the large piece of metal in more detail, and Michael and Martin set off for the anchor. All will have to do very long decompression stops, especially Joop's diving computer turns out to be very conservative and we consider to drag it on the anchor chain when we set off again ...

Only Michael and Martin succeed in taking back something useful, the others have lost their way hopelessly due to the incredibly poor visibility and the even stronger currents and have not been able to find anything that can identify this pile of debris as the final resting place of the KXVI with certainty. We can only wait now to see what comes out of the pictures of the anchor and anchor chain (links).

Gosh, it is all very frustrating. We all feel that this must be the KXVI - it is hardly possible that it is a different ship - but without conclusive evidence we cannot record this as a success.

Eka (the captain) and Dick have been sent under water to loosen the anchor rope from the tangle of nets. When they return Dick bumps his head mercilessly hard at the lift cage and surfaces like a sort of Darth Vader with a head fully covered in blood and a large gash on top of his skull. The First Aid box is dug up and with surgical precision Simon and Sonja clean his head, disinfect the wound, and dress it. Simon kisses the bandage, and now Dick goes through life as a suckerfish. Anyway, it looks spectacular, and is also very funny.

We go back in search of the Katori Maru where we all can make some relaxing dives before we finally return home.

Claire can make two dives for her Advanced Open Water exam (deep diving and night diving), Katja can make a few nice dives, and John can make some action shots of Simon

and Joop that can be useful for the film [touching some stuff near a nondescript piece of metal].

Everyone makes a magnificent dive. Visibility is bad again and there is some current, but strangely enough, the bad visibility causes incredibly many fish to be around! Everywhere there are enormous bat-fishes, groupers and many more beautiful fish. Just below the anchor rope there is a "cleaning station" where small fish clean the larger fish. This is exactly the point where Katja and Sonja make a beautiful dive at a depth of 12m! That afternoon Claire and Klaas discuss the theory on deep dives, night dives, wreck dives, boat dives and navigational dives; they make a "deep" dive on the Katori Maru to the deepest point at 23.3 meters. Really a magnificent dive, everywhere small fish with their mouths open in the current, and under ribs and behind railings beautiful big fish. What a nice dive!

Jessica and Roy set off; after a nice dive they miss the anchor rope on the ascent and, drifting, have to make their safety stop. They surface a long way from the ship! Fortunately, the dinghy is in good order again and they are towed back. Dick has gone into the water with a cap, because of his injured head, and looks even more innocent than usual. Fortunately, Joop is nearby to reassure the fish underwater. Michael and Billian go down at 17h again, Katja and Sonja at 18h and after dinner, the rest of the group have a night dive.

Katja and Sonja have a very relaxed dive to 12m again and make us jealous with their stories of big barracudas and tuna. A pretty picture, the two "moms" (in crew member Nixon's words) at sunset in the water.

After dinner (last leftovers of rice, lobster, chicken and fish - they really must be finished) we all go into the water again.

Klaas accompanies Claire on her first night dive, Roy goes with Jessica again, Simon and Joop go together again and Dick goes with John. Visibility has worsened, barely two meters now, and the current is stronger.

Claire almost loses her weight belt when she goes down, which probably happened when she took her torch. Fortunately, Klaas manages to attach it in the tangle of instruments and lamps. The lead blocks are skewed, however, and during the dive I have to compensate for this incorrect weight distribution. It's really very dark down there and an even stranger world than during the day. Of course I end up down the anchor line with one leg straight into a sea urchin that is comfortably nested there, but I don't break its spines, so no damage done. We descend along the bow and see all the coral in red-yellow, open and alive. Brilliant! We see a couple of lobsters, but not as many as the others - who boast that they have seen ten and at least three barracudas. Must be my lack of experience. I wear no gloves so while looking under the ledges I must keep myself standing (or floating) in the current - which is really not easy, especially with a skewed weight distribution. I see pairs of lights everywhere, some greyish, others greenish as they are apparently between algae. Marine life at night is really quite different than during the day, unfortunately we do not see as many fish as we did earlier today. A flash lamp is attached to the anchor line for easy navigation, which also gives a spooky effect. We paddle round for a wonderful and exciting half hour before we start our ascent with safety stop at 3m. Now we see all the bubbles and beams of light below us. Beautiful!

When we surface, the first thing we notice is the awesome sky. During our night dive Sonia and Katja have watched over the ship and on the darkened deck they looked up admiringly at a beautiful galaxy and even a few shooting stars.

This was the last dive of our expedition. The equipment is thoroughly rinsed and hung to dry on deck. Simon knows that the difference between wet and dry items amounts up to 10 kg. Considering the volume of our luggage, we hope that the wind will do a good job tonight

Judging by the fully open sky it will stay dry tonight. The awesome sky is less visible due to the rise of the still almost full moon - at first fiery-orange, later white-yellow - but still nice.

Most of us are completely exhausted after the dives today, and go to bed early.

Our last night at sea, what a joy that it is such a beautiful farewell! After all the hardships two such beautiful days and nights are a blessing.

It was truly a special journey with a rapid succession of all the emotions, hardships and happy moments. Truly blood, sweat and tears!

Maybe we will soon get irrefutable proof - on the basis of our footage - that we have actually found the K-XVI.

Maybe many years will pass before we have collected sufficient means for a follow-up expedition.

Who knows.

I think most of us had formed a different idea of this trip in advance - after all this should have been the dry season, and we had really brought a number of promising coordinates. Of course we were well prepared that it might result in disappointment, but that is not the stuff we are made of. Last year, the O20 was found very quickly, but this time the situation was simply different. But at least we have done everything in our power and that makes us feel good, anyway.

Immediately after the night dive we hoist the anchor and sail home under the watchful eye of the moon on the water. Goodbye KXVI, many of us think. Who knows we will soon meet again.