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## **The National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) and the Mexican Navy (SEMAR) find the shipwreck of the gunner "Tampico", protagonist of the Mexican Revolution at sea**

\*\*\* After two field seasons, carried out with Navy technology and based on documentary and sources, the wreck was located in the waters of the state of Sinaloa

\*\*\* After deep diving at 40 meters, underwater archaeologists of INAH have confirmed the identity of the historic ship, sunk in combat 105 years ago.

Although not well known, the Mexican Revolution was also fought at sea. The most iconic naval engagement of that war occurred between March and June 1914, in Topolobampo, Sinaloa. Experts from the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) and the Mexican Navy (SEMAR), have located the wreck of the gunner "Tampico" actor of the the first air to sea battle in history.

Product of two field seasons, specialists from the Underwater Archeology Office (SAS) of INAH, located, together with Mexican Navy personnel, that according to Dr. Roberto Junco Sánchez, head of SAS is a "'tomb of war' that will allow us to learn more about an important naval combat, and the story of the legendary commander of the 'Tampico', Captain Hilario Rodríguez Malpica.

Dr. Junco, reports that, in the first season, held from March 30 to April 2 aboard the Oceanographic Research Vessel "Río Tecolutla" of SEMAR, three-dimensional images of the seabed were obtained by means of a multibeam sonar that revealed the presence of an 'anomaly', which corresponded to the dimensions of the revolutionary gunner: 60 meters in length by 10 of beam. In the second stage, carried out from September 8 to 12 with a Navy side scan sonar, the archaeologists made two dives "at 40 meters deep" that confirmed the identity of the "Tampico".

In this first visit to the site, made 105 years after the last sighting of the ship, it was found in a considerable state of deterioration, and in future dives a 3D models will be developed to help monitor the wreck.

Dr. Junco mentioned, that the intention to study this episode of the Mexican Revolution is based on more than a decade of research in literature and naval archives of Mexico and the United States, by a team composed of the historian Raúl Tapia, photographer Alberto Soto, and archaeologist Josué Guzmán among other members of SAS.

The conjunction of such documentary sources, with testimonies from Topolobampo fishermen, defined a series of survey areas that were then surveyed with multi-beam sonar from the navy ship "Rio Tecolotla".

## **Reconstructing the history of the battle of Topolobampo**

Both the "Tampico" and its enemy: the gunner-transport "Guerrero", were built - the first in shipyards of New Jersey, USA, and the second in Liverpool, England – as part of a project by Bernardo Reyes, Minister of War and Navy, of President Porfirio Díaz, who in the early twentieth century modernized the naval fleet of Mexico.

The historian Raúl Tapia details that, in 1913, when Victoriano Huerta rose to power after deposing President Francisco I. Madero, a large part of the federal forces remained faithful to him, which included the fleet of gunners and gunner-transports; the latter, with greater military capacity.

However, on February 22, 1914, the first lieutenant of the Tampico, Hilario Rodríguez Malpica- with 25 years to that date -rebelled in Guaymas, Sonora, and along with other officers, imprisoning the ship's captain, Manuel Castellanos. Later, after releasing those who did not support the revolutionary cause, the new captain went to Topolobampo, then controlled by General Venustiano Carranza's troops.

After defining the battlefield, the central government ordered to punish the betrayal of Rodríguez Malpica, therefore, on March 3, the "Guerrero" began a blockade of the Sinaloa port and, a day later, along with the gunner "Morelos" Opened fire on the "Tampico. "

A second encounter occurred on March 13 when the "Tampico" tried to leave Topolobampo. The attacks resumed on the last day of that month: the federal forces had placed two obsolete ships (the "Democrat" and the "Oaxaca") to hinder the eventual flight of the revolutionaries. "You have to remember that Topolobampo is a wide bay, but only navigable through a narrow underwater channel," says Tapia.

From March 31 until April 22, fire continued between the "Guerrero" and the "Tampico", with an almost fatal balance for the latter if it had not been for the help of the biplane "Sonora", from which hand bombs were thrown that failed to damage, but scared away the "Guerrero", which along with the "Oaxaca" and "Democrata", returned to the port of Guaymas.

Tapia explains: "From April 22 to June 10 everything possible was done to refloat the "Tampico" recalling how the gunner left the port on June 14 in the direction of the port of Mazatlan, where repairs would continue as one of its two boilers was broken. However, some 30 nautical miles out, the boiler that kept it running also failed and left the ship adrift.

Two US destroyers, the USS "Preble" and the USS "Perry", witnessed the battles, so their records were key to define the coordinates of the battle. "These ships were in Mexican waters to protect the interests of American citizens in the region, due to the political instability created by the Revolution; Also, German ships and a Japanese imperial navy, were around" explains the historian.

Captain Rodríguez Malpica requested help from the USS "Preble", but it was denied for neutrality reasons. Thus, motionless, the men of the "Tampico" spotted the "Guerrero" at 05:00 on June 16, 1914, the gunner-transport was being followed by the USS "New Orleans."

It was the final battle. Three American ships were eyewitnesses and, at 07:48, began the shots with a clear advantage to the "Guerrero" because, unlike the "Tampico", the ship could move to avoid impacts.

During the shots, a fire started on the revolutionary ship and, at 09:50, the captain gave a double order: to leave the ship and open its bottom valves to take it to the seabed.

Already in lifeboats, the men tried to reach land, but were intercepted by the "Guerrero." It was in that extreme situation that Hilario Rodríguez Malpica took his gun, took it to his mouth and pulled the trigger.

"In addition to a sense of honor as captain that sinks with his ship, Malpica may have committed suicide by anticipating that, because of the betrayal he had committed, he would be in any way executed," concludes Raúl Tapia.

The SAS team, headed by Roberto Junco, concludes that finding the "Tampico" is the first step to investigate and make visible an epic episode of the Mexican Revolution that has not been given the attention it deserves. After the sinking of the "Tampico", the "Guerrero", the USS "Preble", USS "Perry" and USS "New Orleans" lowered their flags at half-mast in honor of the Captain de Ship, Rodríguez Malpica and His fallen men.

### **Porthole of the "Tampico" will be delivered to the Mexican Navy Museum**

As a witness of this battle and as a tribute to those who participated in this historical episode, INAH, will deliver to the Mexican Navy a porthole recovered from the wreck of the gunner "Tampico", in the first days of next December.

The crushed porthole was found broken off the wreck, so it was chosen as a representative piece of the wreck as well as to prevent it from being pillaged.

Currently, the bronze porthole is subject to a process of conservation and stabilization by INAH conservator Enna Llabrés. Its exhibition is contemplated in the room at the Naval Museum Mexico run by Semar in the port of Veracruz, where the topic of the revolution is covered and the story of Captain Hilario Rodríguez and the battles of Topolobampo are remembered.