

## **Beyond the Blue - Volume 1 Issue 1 Aut/Winter 2003**

### **Szent Istvan Expedition 2003**

A team of Italian divers has spent over ninety-six hours exploring the wreck of the Austro-Hungarian battleship Szent Istvan sunk off the Croatian coast in June 1918. The twelve divers, a mix of instructors and trimix divers from Italy used Trimix to explore the wreck that now lies in sixty-seven metres of water.

The Austro-Hungarian fleet including the battleships Szent Istvan and Tegetthoff had set sail for Otranto on the 9th June 1918 and a day later accidentally came into contact with two small Italian torpedo boats that were engaged in a mine sweeping operation.

Lieutenant Commander Luigi Rizzo of the Italian Navy used the size and speed of his craft to close within of 500m the battleships before attacking them and sinking the Szent Istvan, the pride of the Austro-Hungarian Navy. The shockwaves that this attack sent through the Austro-Hungarian Navy meant that they did not take part in any further operations for the remainder of World War One.

The expedition was led by Fabio Ruberti who worked closely with the Croatian Government that provided four underwater archaeologists from the Croatian Ministry of Culture to support the team. The good relationship allowed numerous bureaucratic and political difficulties to be overcome and the granting of the special permission needed to dive the gigantic shipwreck, the Szent Istvan is some 21,254 tons and more than 160 metres in length.

The expedition also had the task of celebrating the 85th anniversary of the sinking in which almost 100 lives were lost. The team and the Croatian Ministry of Culture jointly left a wreath on the shipwreck as a sign of goodwill between the two shores of the Adriatic Sea.