

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE LADY IN THE PRESIDENT'S SMOKING ROOM

201 Wickham Terrace
Brisbane
Queensland 4000
6/10/98

Dear Editor

It is every diver's ambition to dive on the *President Coolidge* at Santo, the world's largest accessible sunken liner.

The Lady (her portrait is below) is the highlight of diving on the *President Coolidge* and lies at a depth of 45 m (150 ft). When I first saw the art work through the gloom of the torchlight two years ago one could not be blamed for thinking one was slightly "narked". The unusual relief consists of a standing woman in Elizabethan garb next to a unicorn (now minus its horn). The fireplace ornament was first found by Allan Power in 1981.¹ Apparently it had been protected by a timber covering when the liner was converted to a troopship. In the years since the ship struck a US minefield, on October 26th 1942, the timber had rotted away.

During a second dive to *The Lady* it was examined in more detail and Bettina and I questioned the significance of a combination of an Elizabethan woman standing next to a unicorn. To our knowledge none of the written material about the wreck discuss this enigma.



According to myth a unicorn is seen only by virgins or women of gentle nature. The *President Coolidge* was launched in Virginia, which was named by Sir Francis Drake in honour of the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth 1.

We propose that the female figure in fact represents Queen Elizabeth 1. This would explain her gown, the full ruff as worn by an unmarried woman and also her reddish hair, albeit slightly faded.

What we believe seals the argument, is the presence of what almost certainly represents two Tudor roses, one above *The Lady's* left arm and another below the unicorn's left front hoof. The Tudor rose was, of course, the family emblem of Elizabeth 1.

In any event *The Lady* warrants at least one visit should one have the opportunity of diving to the first class passengers' smoking room on the *President Coolidge*. For the careful and experienced diver it is a safe and rewarding dive.

William Douglas

Acknowledgments

Photograph courtesy of Steve Hills, Prodiver, Milton, Brisbane, Queensland.

Reference

1 Stone P. *The Lady and the President*. Melbourne: Ocean Enterprises, 1997

Key Words

Environment, general interest, history.

DAN SEAP INSURANCE COVER AND VANUATU

201 Wickham Terrace
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15/10/98

Dear Editor

The recent decision by DAN S.E.Asia-Pacific to discontinue evacuation cover for Vanuatu does not surprise me. I have treated three divers with decompression sickness and one with near drowning at the Santo Hospital. The conditions in Santo Hospital are atrocious and I cannot imagine anybody who has the experience to run a decompression chamber safely, staying in that town to run a chamber.