The English Channel saw all manner of different craft in its waters during the First World War. Some of these, such as fishing boats and colliers, continued the work they had been doing for years in peace time. Others were unique to the war and reflected the mounting losses on the Western Front.

By 1917 no vessel was safe from the U-boats, no matter what its purpose or nationality and an extensive range of different tactics were employed to protect ships, including the use of planes and airships.

HMHS Asturias

HMHS Asturias was one of thirteen allied hospital ships sunk or damaged between 1915 and 1918 as a result of enemy action.

Loss

HMHS Asturias was requisitioned from the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company in August 1914 and became one of the largest cross-channel hospital ships.

On the morning of 13th April 1918, SSZ 15 set out from Bridport in Dorset. The pilot, lieutenant G R J Parkinson, was accompanied by Air Mechanics R T James (engineer) and V H Hudson (wireless operator). At approximately 9.45pm, after the Zero control car was designed to float on water and the crew were equipped with life jackets. However, historic records show that other airships were recalled that afternoon due to rising winds and decreasing visibility, so it is possible that poor weather contributed to the crew's loss. Parkinson's body later washed up at Exmouth and James's body was found at Berry Head, near Brixham. Hudson was never found.

On the morning of 13th April 1918, SSZ 15 was seen setting out from Bridport in Dorset. The pilot, lieutenant G R J Parkinson, was accompanied by Air Mechanics R T James (engineer) and V H Hudson (wireless operator). At approximately 9.45pm, after the airship had been in the air for almost 15 hours, SSZ 15 was seen landing on the sea two miles south of Exmouth, probably as the water was too rough to land at Bridport.

Disadvantages included a slow speed (40 – 55 mph), vulnerability to enemy aircraft, the need for light winds plus significant infrastructure requirements at base, including hydrogen and hangars.

The Forgotten Wrecks are not all ships and boats. Airships and aircraft of various types were officially reported as missing, presumed drowned.

HMHS Asturias was one of thirteen allied hospital ships sunk or damaged between 1915 and 1918 as a result of enemy action.

The Forgotten Wrecks is supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.