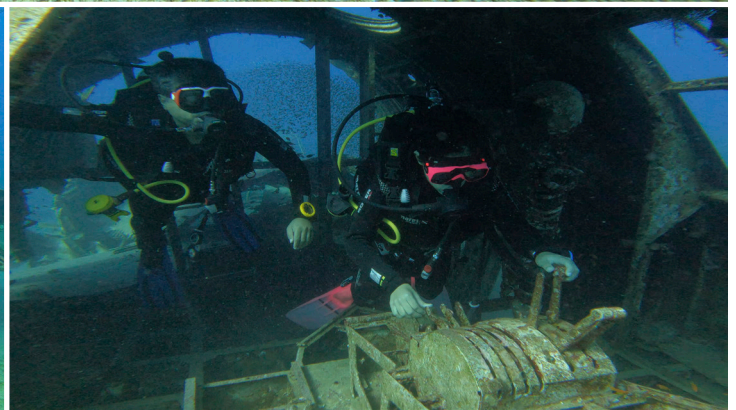


DIVING INTO THE HERCULES C-130

BY **TISYA PANIGRAHI (14)** – JUNIOR ADVANCED OPEN WATER DIVER



Diving into the depths of the Red Sea was an experience I'll never forget. My father (who is also an Advanced Open Water diver) and I embarked on an extraordinary adventure that took us 55 feet below the surface, where we explored a sunken Hercules C-130 aircraft. This dive was not just a typical underwater exploration – it was an opportunity to connect with history, marine life, and the wonders of the ocean in a way I had never expected.

The Hercules C-130 is an iconic aircraft, known for its impressive size and its service in the military of over 70 countries since the 1950s. The specific aircraft we dove into was donated by the Royal Jordanian Air Force and transformed into an artificial reef in 2017. As

we descended into the clear waters of Aqaba, Jordan, the massive structure of the plane gradually came into view, creating a surreal and awe-inspiring sight.

Upon reaching the aircraft, we entered through the middle section and made our way to the cockpit. The experience of being inside such a large and historically significant aircraft, now serving as a home to a variety of marine life, was truly unique. I even had the chance to sit in the cockpit and handle the controls, as well as get spooked by a skeleton which was fake (or at least, I hope it was fake). It was simply surreal to be in the cockpit and instead of looking into the sky, I was looking at a complex ecosystem of fish swimming back

and forth interacting with each other.

This experience also deepened my appreciation for the ocean and its ability to transform something as complex as an aircraft, into a vibrant marine habitat. Seeing fish swim through the plane's fuselage and corals growing on its wings, highlighted the resilience of nature and the importance of preserving our oceans.

This dive was more than just an adventure; it was an opportunity to witness firsthand how nature can reclaim and transform, creating beauty and life where one might least expect it. It's an experience I will carry with me, both as a diver, and as someone deeply committed to understanding and protecting our oceans.