

**Extreme diving** — Ontario cave divers • Pumping nitrox

November 1996 \$3.50

# DIVER

MAGAZINE

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Blast from the past  
**Columbia sinking**

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# BLAST FROM THE PAST

*The recently sunk HMCS Columbia has enhanced an already popular dive destination. Divers travelling to Campbell River from all parts of the world are expected to converge on the new artificial reef as a first priority.*

*By Stephanie Bold*

**O**n June 22 off Maud Island near Campbell River, BC, after a pagentry of explosions and fireworks from the guns and stack, the charges were fired and the *Columbia* sank in less than four minutes.

Large holes were cut into the sides of the ship so that if diver penetrate the wreck they need swim no more than a few feet before seeing an exit hole. As for the safety of marine life, the ship was thoroughly prepared beforehand and any remaining oil and contaminants were removed before sinking was allowed.

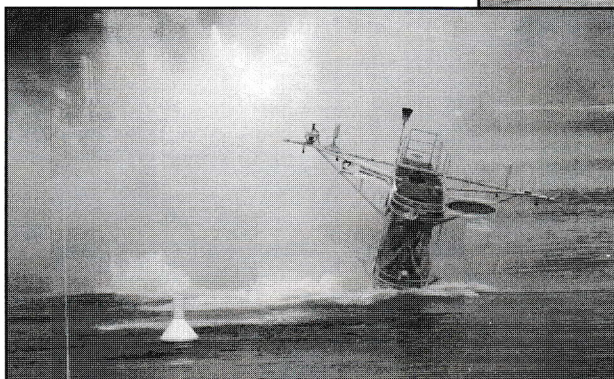
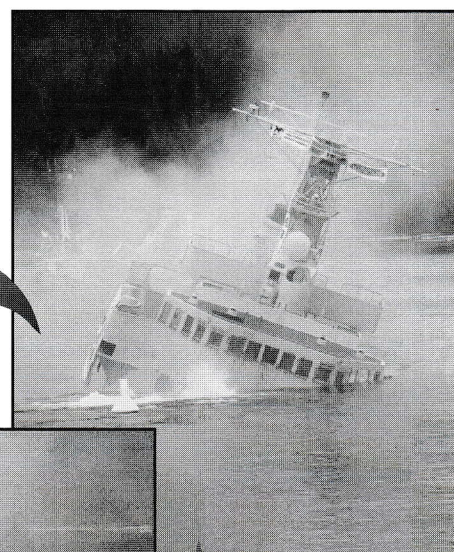
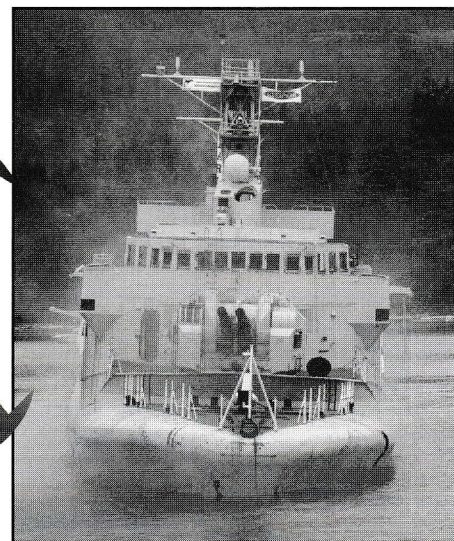
A key component to sinking a ship of this size is finding a location that will welcome it. And the town of Campbell River was buzzing with anticipation of calling the vessel theirs. Before the sinking, thousands of residents and visitors toured the ship to get an idea of where they would be diving or to quench a curiosity for what a military ship looks like on the inside. On the sinking day hundreds of people were ferried to Maud Island to watch the event from the relative comfort of shore.

What is the verdict now that the ship has been submerged for a few months? Divers consider it a pretty good place to visit and marine life considers it an excellent place to live. Local charter operators report favourable reaction from their clients and liveaboard vessels try to stop by en route to northern Vancouver Island. Rockfish, lingcod, sculpins and nudibranchs have moved in, while rumours of a resident octopus circulate. Summer visibility has ranged from 30 to 60 feet with improvement expected in the Winter.

Finally, there is the issue of the ring. A Campbell River jewellery designer has donated a \$4,000 diamond ring to the ARSBC's efforts to attract divers to the area. Somewhere on the wreck no deeper than 65 feet was placed a token redeemable for a ladies' dinner ring. The ring, after three months, has still not been found.



After three months underwater the *Columbia* has attracted numerous species of fish and invertebrates. For more information on diving the *Columbia* and the Campbell River area contact one of the facilities on page 38 of this issue.



**The HMCS *Columbia* took less than four minutes to sink.**