



GUNS 'N ROSES

Saguenay and Mackenzie, warships both, built in peacetime and, commendably, keepers of it without firing a hostile shot. Today, they are transformed. These sub killers, once replete with deadly armaments, today are marine gardens, delighting divers who explore Canada's Atlantic and Pacific waters. At the decade mark we salute them both for their service past and present.

HMCS Mackenzie

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DOUG PEMBERTON

In October 1962 *HMCS Mackenzie* joined Canada's naval fleet as the first of the Mackenzie class destroyer escorts. At 366 feet (111m) long and 2,900 tonnes she was similar in size and basic design to the Restigouche class of ships that preceded her but *HMCS Mackenzie* had some significant differences in order to fulfill her role in anti-submarine warfare. Triple barrel anti-submarine mortars were mounted on the aft deck and her stern was redesigned to allow for a towed sonar array.

HMCS Mackenzie served with distinction on many international missions and exercises until 1972, after which she became primarily a training vessel. She was decommissioned in 1993 and subsequently acquired by the Artificial Reef Society of B.C. (ARSBC). On September 16, 1995, the *Mackenzie* began the second phase of her distinguished career and, on that day, she was not alone. Over 1,200 boats, the largest flotilla ever to assemble in B.C. history, gathered off Gooch Island near the Vancouver Island port of Sidney to witness the sinking of the ARSBC's third artificial reef.

After all appropriate ceremony and fanfare the 'Mac' went down quickly and now sits upright in approximately 100 feet (30m) with the top of her radar mast about 40 feet (12m) below the surface. Currents can be strong and unpredictable around the ship and it is because of these currents that a profusion of life has been drawn to her over the past 10 years. In fact, the attached charter boat mooring lines have to be cleaned of the growth a couple of times annually or they sink under its weight!

Today, *Mackenzie's* decks, passageways and centres of activity are silent. Long gone is the crew of 233 enlisted men and 12 officers who brought her to life. In their place are colourful anemones, tunicates, tubeworms, sponges, nudibranchs, swimming scallops and giant barnacles, invertebrates galore. Ten years later, some parts of this vessel are almost unrecognizable for the cover of marine life. Decks are now patrolled by large cabezon, lingcod and at least four species of rockfish as well as kelp greenlings and small sculpins. Several octopuses have called *Mackenzie* home over the years, too.

The *Mackenzie* is a fantastic dive but not without hazards. Currents can be strong and visibility is unpredictable, averaging about 25 feet (7.5m). As with all the artificial reefs sunk by the ARSBC, the 'Mac' has been made as safe as possible with current training standards, differing experience levels and good old common sense in mind. Many large openings permit wreck penetration on several deck levels, into operations and mess areas, crew quarters, and other compartments. Exploration of her interior is best left to divers with proper training and equipment. For those who prefer an outside view, there's plenty to see on the exterior of this colourful reef. 🍀

HMCS MACKENZIE - FOR THE RECORD

Type: Destroyer Escort
Class: Mackenzie
Displacement: 2,380 tonnes
Length: 366 feet
Width: 42 feet
Draft: 13.5 feet
Top Speed: 28 knots
Officers: 12
Crew: 233
Weapons: 4 - 3-inch (2 x II), 2 Limbo, Homing Torpedoes
Pendant (Hull Number): 261
Builder: Canadian Vickers Ltd., Montreal, Que.
Laid Down: 15-Dec-58
Launched: 25-May-61
Commissioned: 6-Oct-62
Paid Off: 3-Aug-93
Remarks: Major refit (DELEX) in 1985. Sunk as an artificial reef September 16, 1995 off Gooch Island, near Sidney, B.C. (Position: 48 40.094 N, 123 17.170 W)