

## Coast Guard College Training Vessel Helps Explode Mine At Harbor Entrance

By DOUG MAGINLEY

In a bizarre echo of World War II,

a mine, whether live or practice is not certain, surfaced recently at the entrance to Sydney and had to be disposed of by a Navy diving team with the assistance of the Coast Guard College.

First reported on September 7 as "an object like a propane tank", it was lost sight of for several days. Then, a series of reports identified the object as a possible mine, still attached to its mooring.

On Sunday, September 26, the

Coast Guard College received a request from DND to provide a vessel to take a disposal team to the scene. The newly acquired training vessel "Erebus", a 35-foot fibre-glass diesel trawler, was ideal for the job, as she could be operated by one person and the disposal team wanted as few people as possible in the danger area.

At 1510 the "Erebus" left the Coast Guard College with James G. Calvesbert, an instructor from the Navigation Department, in charge, with a Navy diving team consisting of Lt. Coulombe, WO Verhaeghe and PO Wilson, and with a 14-foot Boston Whaler in tow.

Using previously reported positions and recent updates for the CN Ferry "Frederick Carter", the mine was located about two miles off the main ferry track of the entrance to Sydney harbor.

At 1730 the "Erebus" was close to the mine which was identified by the diving team as a British MK17 mine of pre WWII manufacture. Antenna wires as well as the remains of horns indicated that it could have been a deeply laid anti-submarine mine designed to defend Sydney harbour in wartime. If so, it must have remained attached to its sinker for up to forty years. When it did break loose, the depth setting was inoperative and the mine rose to the surface where it could be seen and disposed of.

Jim Calvesbert described the events that followed: "As darkness would soon be approaching, it was decided to explode the mine as soon as possible. Performing under difficult sea conditions, the divers attached a satchel pack of explo-

sives to the lower part of the mine. When this was completed, the "Erebus" proceeded to a position 3/4 of a mile away to await the timed explosion and ensure that no other vessels entered the area. The exact state of the mine's explosive being unknown, the satchel charge was made large enough to completely destroy the mine itself. When the blast occurred, the upward directionally oriented explosion shot a black streak 150-200 feet into the air. We were all convinced that the mine's main charge had exploded, and that any vessel that had struck it would have been destroyed or badly damaged."

Jim paid tribute to the Navy diver who worked to attach the satchel charges while holding on to the barnacle encrusted mine with his legs in a choppy sea whipped by a 25-knot breeze.

Was the mine a real one from World War II or a practice mine left over from minesweeping exercises in the '50's? It is hard to tell, as records are sketchy. No one seems to be sure if controlled minefields were laid off Sydney during the war. Research is being carried out by the Armed Forces historical section. In either case, it had to be treated as a fully charged and dangerous mine and the disposal team deserved full credit for their efforts.

Coast Guard College training vessels like the "Erebus" have now been involved in SAR, buoy-checking, diving and demolition operations, providing services to the public as well as training for the Officer Cadets of the College.

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*An Explosive Ordnance Diving Disposal Team from Fleet Diving Unit (Atlantic) at CFB Shearwater received well deserved credit for efforts conducted under hazardous conditions. LT(N) Maurice Coulombe, Petty Officer First Class Wilson and Petty Officer Second Class Jules Verhaeghe received the Maritime Commanders Commendation for performing technical skills under difficult sea conditions during the disposal of a mine assumed to be armed in Sydney Harbour on 19 Sep. 82.*