

# Fleet Diving Unit's quest for adventure

By **LS Sean Dockrill**

**Canadian Clearance Diver (UWE)**

A professional diver's life is driven by a quest for adventure. It is why we willingly undergo the arduous training required to be certified as a Canadian Clearance Diver or a Reserve Port Inspection Diver. This internal drive is the essence of the nature of the lads and lasses who brave the dangers of the deep in often-extreme conditions. So when the operation tasking order sent a dive team to our most Northern Outpost, CF Station ALERT, to dive in the Arctic Ocean in 2 degree Celsius water temperature surrounded by glaciers, pack ice and icebergs, you can bet there was no shortage of volunteers for the job.

Our tasking itself was simple: collect underwater sediment samples in support of the 8 Wing Environment office's Contaminated Sites Management Plan based out of Trenton; conduct a survey of the fresh water intakes for the station; and, check the condition of the air-field-grounding grid, which was damaged by pack ice and repaired by the divers. That being said, the collaboration of the different agencies required to organize this mission successfully was monumental.

Spearheading this effort was Don

Kovanen, the Assistant Environmental Advisor to the military for 8 Wing Trenton. He coordinated the funding and logistical support for this particular project, and developed the 10-step process for addressing a contaminated site. Not a simple job as he is dealing with not only the triad of the military organizations—Army, Navy, and Air Force, but also has to coordinate with civilian organizations such as the National Research Council of Canada (NRCC) and their personnel. This all sounds simple, but throw in the erratic availability of Hercs coming in and out of the region, which is just the nature of the terrain when dealing with the harsh northern environment, and life can become entangled in a hurry.

Dr. David Juck, PhD, is a research officer from the Environmental Microbiology Lab of NRCC, and his counterpart Josee Sirois, the Lab Technical Officer, were responsible for collecting the samples from the divers. They specialize in environmental mediation using the natural bacteria of the surrounding environment. Their job will be to provide a preliminary characterization of contamination and delineate the boundary of the different sites. Both Dr. Juck and Ms. Sirois acknowledge the fragile nature of the ecosystem up here and are passionate about their



*A dive team from FDU(A) went to CFS Alert to collect underwater sediment samples.*

work. Dr. Juck stated "that the previous mentality of the solution to pollution was dilution has been around for too long and is slowly changing; that is, throwing it out the back door just isn't going to do it anymore." "It is a very fragile environment that if one component disappears or is damaged everything else relies on it." An example of this is the lemming population. Current studies from environment Canada show that the lem-

ming population is low this year, for whatever reason. This means that the wolf pups that were born in this region may have a hard time to survive because they depend so heavily on this food source. Farther south this would not be a problem because there are more steps in the food chain, but here we are so far up North it is definitely a problem.

The joy that Dr. Juck takes in his work is apparent. "I love being out-

side with nature, and I get to be intimately involved with it. Cleaning it up and restoring it to a much more healthy system." This enthusiasm is contagious and is one of the components that allowed Fleet Diving Unit (Atlantic)'s team of divers to operate so efficiently with this collage of organizations. Another reason was the expertise and professionalism shown by the team of divers. Led by PO1 Craig Atkinson, who was responsible for the organization and safety of his team, MS Rob Williams, MS RJ MacDonald, LS Sean Dockrill, LS Mike Heyer and LS Zack Verdun were exemplary in their ability to quickly set up their equipment, navigate their way through murky, contaminated, bitterly cold water and a shore lined with the jagged metal of ripped and rusty barrels.

They operated with skill and enthusiasm that allowed the team to finish the jobs expected of them expeditiously and set a standard of which the Navy should be proud. This team supported by the outstanding CFS ALERT staff, including the Foreman, MCpl Martin and the cooking staff, transportation officer, demonstrated that through collaboration and teamwork our military is paving the way to a better country and hence a better world.