

Press Release · For immediate Release
Vancouver, Canada
May 31st, 2016



Coast Trader. From the archives of Grahame F. Shrader.

Wreck of Torpedoed WWII Merchant Vessel Found off the Coast of Vancouver Island

Later this week the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Ocean Exploration Trust are planning an important dive on what is presumed to be the wreck of the torpedoed WWII merchant vessel, *Coast Trader*.

Almost 74 years after the *Coast Trader* was hit by a torpedo from the Japanese submarine *I-26*, NOAA have almost certainly located the wrecked vessel and plan to make an archaeological assessment dive on June 2nd 2016 using a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV).

This amazing discovery will not only shed light on this often overlooked piece of history, but may even prove to rewrite it.

On June 7th, 1942, the *Coast Trader* left Port Angeles with a cargo of 1250 tons of newsprint destined for San Francisco. It didn't get far however, as the *I-26* was lying in wait at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca for US aircraft carriers and mistook the *Coast Trader* for its intended target. A torpedo ripped through the vessel's hull causing the 36 crew members, a number of whom were badly injured, to abandon ship in the one surviving lifeboat and two rafts. It took just 40 minutes for the vessel to sink beneath the waves, and the crew were eventually rescued and taken to Neah Bay, 30 miles away.

Despite three crewmember witness accounts of seeing the conning tower of a submarine as they clung to the lifeboat, the Navy determined that the wreck was caused by an internal explosion. The crew always maintained it was the result of a submarine attack. One crew member said, "We were scared as hell the sub might machine gun us like the way we've been reading about in the papers". During the war, the Government had tight control over the media and often downplayed torpedo strikes as internal explosions. However, on opening Japanese naval files after the war was over it was discovered that *I-26* reported having conducted a torpedo attack on an unidentified merchant ship on the same date and location of where the *Coast Trader* went down.



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The I-26 submarine. Courtesy of the Yamato Museum. Photograph no. PG072092.

A number of surface attacks followed just two weeks after this incident and resulted in the first enemy shells to hit American and Canadian soil since the War of 1812, really bringing the war 'home'.

The wreck's location was identified by a Canadian Hydrographic Service survey. A multi beam image shows the wreck resting on the seabed, 138m under the water and substantially intact.

The dive will be coordinated by a remote ashore team based at the Ocean Exploration Command Centre at the Graduate School of Oceanography of the University of Rhode Island, and an offshore team at the dive site. Lead Scientist, Dr. Bob Embley, will lead the team at the dive site aboard the Exploration Vessel Nautilus, and Lead Scientist, Dr. Steve Hammond, will lead the ashore team. Present will be ocean scientists, educators, historians and US & Canadian Coast Guard, and Vancouver Maritime Museum Curator, Duncan MacLeod, will be there acting as the West Coast Canadian Maritime Heritage representative.

The main aims are to confirm whether the wreck is that of the *Coast Trader*; determine the area of torpedo impact and damage; assess the wreck's condition and integrity; and to see if oil is visibly leaking from the wreck as it has the potential to be a pollution hazard having sunk within hours of departing port with a full load of fuel.

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There will be a live feed from the dive, available here: <http://www.nautiluslive.org/>

Available for Interview by phone:
Duncan MacLeod, Curator at the Vancouver Maritime Museum.

Available for Interview in Vancouver:
Ken Burton, Executive Director of the Vancouver Maritime Museum.

For more information please contact Ken Burton at: director@vanmaritime.com · 604-257-8301