



THIS PAGE:
Divers explores the wreck of the *Lermontov*

Text and photos
by Kevin Davidson

Make way for the shoreline—the ship is taking on water and fast! Perhaps these were not the exact words used to describe the situation, but the sinking of the *MS Mikhail Lermontov* has now become one of the largest diveable wrecks in New Zealand for both recreational and technical divers.



Lermontov Wreck

The 155-meter-long *Mikhail Lermontov* was part of a fleet of five luxury liners named after famous Russian writers and was a regular cruise ship in New Zealand waters. On 16 February 1986, she left Picton accompanied by harbor master

Don Jamison. With the captain gone to his cabin and Jamison in charge, the harbor master took a course between the lighthouse and the end of Cape Jackson instead of clearing the rocky reef, which extended past Walker Rock and was

clearly shown on the charts.

The vessel was drawing about 27 feet. Captain Jamison claimed his understanding of the depth in the channel to be 35 to 40 feet. However, it would have been a very foolhardy course to take for anyone





Forests of kelp thrive along the hull of the *Lermontov* wreck (right); Diver (below) explores interior of *Lermontov*; Divers find abundant coral growth on the wreck (far right)



aware of the presence of the rocks. At about 5:37 PM, there was a thud, and the ship started to list, as water flooded through a 40-foot-long gash in the hull, entering three water-tight bulkheads. In the meantime, an announcement was made that dinner would be delayed, and the wine tasting session that was in progress would be extended. But the wine tasting stopped when the ship tipped over far enough to send glasses sliding off tables.

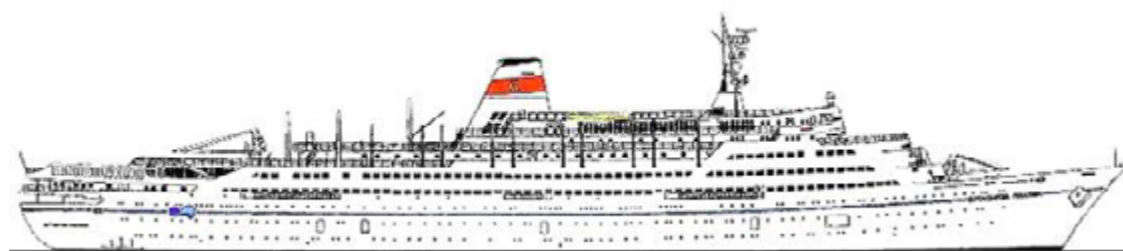
The loud noises that emanated from the *Lermontov* would haunt passengers forever, as the vessel sank. Items on deck rocketed to the surface, into the air and came down, causing a cacophony of violent sounds. Huge bubbles soared from

the surface adding to the deafening noises the *Lermontov* made while sinking.

Diving the wreck

How can one individual's mistake be a diver's delight? The answer: have an unfortunate accident resulting in one of the largest and most easily accessible wrecks at rest in only 36 meters of water. With diving depths starting in as little as 12 meters, the *Lermontov* wreck is suitable for both recreational and technical divers.

Our team of GUE divers were able to utilize all our skills to safely penetrate this wreck and photograph some of the more interesting artifacts. The GUE (Global Underwater Explorer) diver program teaches a



The MS Mikhail Lermontov



wreck rap



Beer cans with visible labels rest in a pile on the wreck



diver to refine their buoyancy skills, work as a team and get the most from wreck penetration or cave diving.

As a 24-year veteran of underwater photography, GUE skills have helped me get the most from the challenge of photographing shipwrecks. I highly recommend looking into this style of training for a diver looking to get better quality out of their diving, especially with respect to wreck and cave diving.

The *Lermontov* wreck

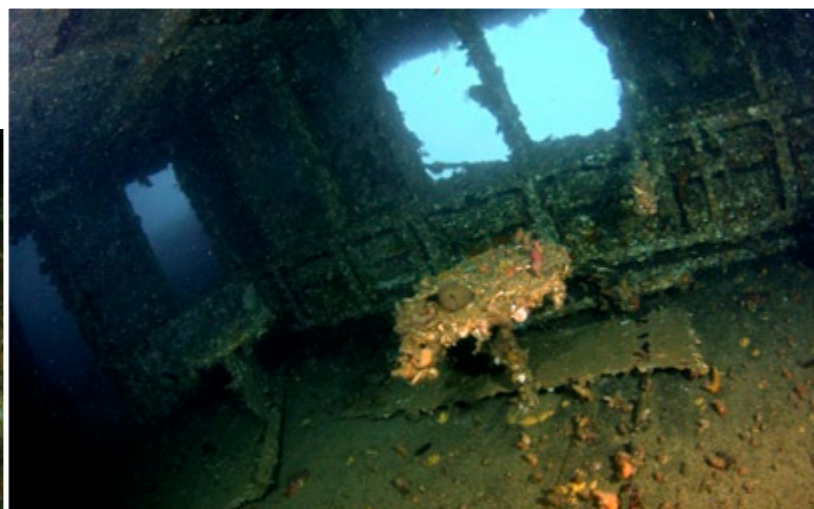
The vessel rests on her starboard side in the Marlborough Sound near Picton,

where water temperatures hover around 15°C. After 25 years on the seabed, a forest of kelp thrives along the hull and provides shelter for smaller fish life.

A drysuit is the best way to explore the *Lermontov* comfortably. After ten days of diving, it seemed I had only just scratched the surface in the exploration of the wreck. I found myself



Lermontov



THIS PAGE: Scenes from diving the *Lermontov*

A favorite panorama was the pool and skylights overhead. However, picture if you can, this gigantic room with a pool inside, now turned on its edge. The large frames from the skylights with a few glass windows still in place caused ambient light to pierce within. A stool bolted down next to the bar poked out from the side of the ship due to its 90-degree angle. Nearby, in a store room, beer cans had tumbled out in a pile, their labels still identifiable.

going back to familiar areas in order to get better images of the more identifiable areas within the ship.

Piles of foam backing from chairs was visible in the movie theater along with a set of stage lights. Visibility ranged from ten to 30 meters and changed throughout the day. The bow and stern had different levels of visibility, all within the same dive. Since my passion is photography, I prefer to get the best possible quality in my photos rather than try to see the whole ship.

Even the best divers will create a certain amount of silt, so I moved my way through the gloaming using my "modified frog kick" (my favorite) hoping that I was the first to arrive, taking pictures carefully before my bubbles caused a change in visibility.

Moving along a companion way, I passed too quickly by the remains of various books from the library. I deftly employed a helicopter kick and came back upon them, photographed them in situ and refrained from moving them to



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create better images. All the fabric and wood of the interior had caused decay, and the gentlest touch caused a good image to go bad, so I moved on in search of fertile grounds.

During a dive, I turned my focus to the exterior of the *Lermontov* and found the lines across the deck looked nice and allowed easy access around the super-

structure. A companion way ran along part of the ship, and I enjoyed the natural light images I saw.

Towards the bow, I looked up as my partner looked down upon the circular radar antennas, giving me a beautiful silhouette image. Poking its way out into the blue, the visibility also allowed a clear view of a mast suspended in



Marlborough Sound near Picton

Lermontov

operates Go Dive Marlborough Lodge and has made hundreds of dives on the *Lermontov* and the surrounding area.

After getting used to my first trip in a drysuit, I found the *Lermontov* to be an excellent location for photography and enjoyed a new challenge in my diving experiences. ■

Kevin Davidson is a widely published underwater photographer and dive writer based in Guam. For more information, visit: Kevindavidsonphotography.com



the pilot house. It's a tight fit, but divers can pass from top to bottom and see the equipment used to steer the massive ship to its next location. The viewing windows allowed entrance through the port side.

Twenty-five years is still young for a shipwreck, so it was interesting to be able to see the ship's machinery with such detail. It almost appeared as if you could turn a switch and start an engine or generator.

The engine room became a favorite place for the team to visit, and I patiently waited for my chance to have a look. As one might imagine, the engine room in a vessel this size is a large and spacious place. But in near black out conditions, it's hard to take it all in. I was able to get an image of part of the engines. Knobs switches and levers adorned the walls causing one to want to go try them all to see if they work.

Afterthoughts

Overall the *Mikhail Lermontov* is an exciting wreck, and I highly recommend it as a must-see for

the serious diver.

Our stay in Marlborough allowed us the luxury of dining on a true marine delicacy. The shallow beach is home to scallops and sea urchins, both of which I enjoyed eating raw right from the hell. A 20-minute dive fetched us our limit of scallops and sea urchins, and we found ourselves in heaven, as we indulged in them.

Our guide for the week operated a live-on-shore dive lodge only a five-minute boat ride from the wreck. It's a fabulous way to get quick access to the *Lermontov*, and there are other fun dives along the reef within the sound. Brent Mcfadden



Auckland at night (above); Really fresh shellfish (center); Diver on wreck of the *Lermontov* (far left)

the water column.

The cooler waters were home to various forms of algae and cup corals that mix in with the kelp beds along the ship's exterior. I did, however, love finding great images on the deck areas where divers could get close. The prop was also easy to view. Divers can get the feeling of just how big a cruise ship really is. Occasionally, when navigating around a ship during a dive, it's easy to lose track of the immensity of these great hulks of metal until you try to swim from one end to the other.

Another dive was reserved for



JIM HANSSON, SJÖHISTORISKA MUSEET (MARITIME MUSEUM, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN)

Mystery wreck surfaces inside Stockholm

Two wrecks dating from the 17th century have been located just off Kastellholmen, a small island in the centre of Stockholm.

One of the wrecks had been sighted before, but the other one came as a complete surprise. "We believe it is a Danish warship," said Andreas Olsson, head of the Maritime Museum's archaeological unit. The bottom around Skeppsholmen and Kastellholmen in Stockholm seems littered with a large number of wrecks dating from the era when Sweden was a major military power. And it is also where the two wrecks of warships were found.

According to Olsson, the wrecks are probably those of warships from the 1600s, which were taken by the Swedish navy as prizes following a battle at sea.

"They brought them home, used them for a while and then scuttled them on this location. We believe one of the wrecks to be that of a Danish ship. The other one we already knew of so this new wreck only adds to the fun," said Olsson.

They literally just showed up recently due to an unusually low waterlevel in Saltsjön; it is currently at its lowest level since the 1940s, when the first vessel was last observed.

In the coming days, the Maritime Museum's experts will take samples and perform dendrochronology to establish when and where the wood in the wrecks originated.

Olsson, who has already been in contact with Danish colleagues, believes the wrecks are the remains of the *Grå Ulven* (Gray Wolf) and *Den Store Drage* (The Great Dragon), which were known to be in the area.

"We do not know for certain that these are indeed the vessels in question, but we do know that these wrecks should be located in this area," said Olsson. "If you go to the Armory, you can see the old banners and other artefacts captured from foreign armed forces, but so much more was sacked, and some of it lies here." ■

Another German WWII found off Norway

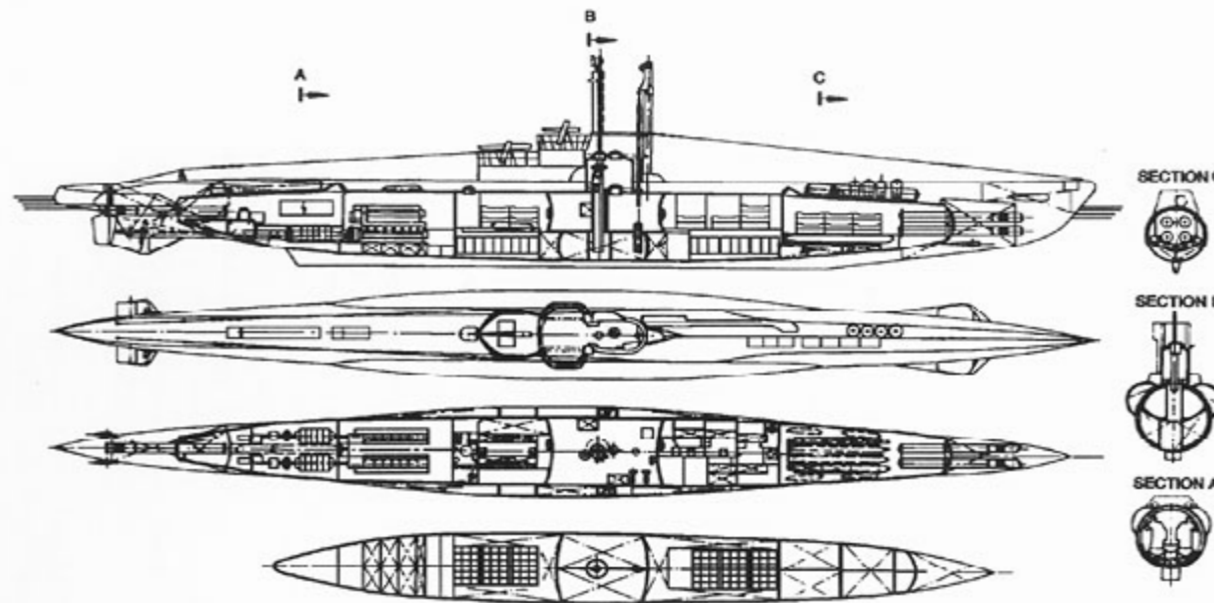
The *U-486* was torpedoed and broken in two by a British submarine in April 1945 shortly after leaving the western Norwegian town of Bergen. There were no survivors.

The oil company Statoil was working on a pipeline off the coast of Norway when they came across the remains of the sunken submarine.

The boat began training on March 22 with the 5th U-boat Flotilla but moved on to the 11th flotilla for operations. She was one of nine Type VIIIs that the Kriegsmarine fitted with an experimental synthetic rubber skin of anechoic tiles known as Alberich, which

had been designed to counter the Allies' asdic/sonar devices.

Arild Maroey Hansen of the Bergen Maritime Museum told Norwegian radio station NRK, that the potential presence of fuel oil and unexploded torpedoes on the recently found submarine could pose a similar problem, while also raising the possibility of other sunken vessels that have yet to be found in nearby waters. ■



Generic drawing of a the German Type VIIIC uboat

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Plymouth Solstice

Got plans to celebrate this year's midsummer eve yet? Why not head for historic Plymouth and join in the fun at the Scuba Solstice. It is being held from Friday 21st – Sunday 23rd June 2013 at the Mount Batten Watersports Centre, Plymstock.

It is no surprise Plymouth has traditionally been a haven for the sports diver—the city boasts a number of dive centres. The area has some of the best diving in the United Kingdom, with sites ranging from shallow scenic reefs to the deeper technical wrecks. The *James Egan Layne* (a large liberty ship sunk in WWII by a torpedo) and *HMS Scylla* (Europe's first purpose sunk wreck) have been many a diver's first sea dive, and they are popular with seasoned veterans, too.

Scuba Solstice tickets will be going on sale shortly and will include all facilities at the Mount Batten Centre (car parking, showers, changing rooms, toilets, bar), live music, disco, a Plymouth Scuba Solstice t-shirt and food over the three-day event.

During the festival, charter boats will run from the Mount Batten pontoon. To secure your space, simply prebook your dive(s) via the website when you book your Scuba Solstice ticket. ■

► www.scubasolstice.com

Diving Pioneers headline TEKCamp 2013

It is hard to imagine but this year will be the third TEKCamp. This inspiring event is organised by and held at Vobster Quay in Somerset, England. (Monday 8 – Friday 12 July).

Winner of the prestigious Innovation Award at EUROTEK.2012, TEKCamp gives divers of all levels the opportunity to take their diving further via an intense week of workshops and lectures under the direct guidance of some of the tech diving industry's leading instructors and pioneers. In the last two years it has helped many divers—including dive professionals—achieve their diving ambitions.

Whether you're a recreational diver looking to 'go tech', or a technical diver who wants to broaden your diving horizons, TEKCamp is for you. TEKCamp provides a unique mentoring program that allows you to develop at your own pace. You don't need to be an "ardent, dyed-in-the-wool hardcore techie" to join in—just a temperate water diver who wants to get more out of your diving.

Big name guests

Some of the biggest names in technical diving will be attending the event including Lamar Hires, Mark Powell, Martin Robson, Phil Short, Rick Stanton MBE, Paul Toomer and Rick Walker, giving divers unrivalled access to top drawer training with most of the major tech diving agencies. It is little wonder that TEKCampees have travelled from Ireland, the

Netherlands and Germany to take part in this incredible event.

Many divers attend because they are thinking of beginning their transition into more technical diving. However, this is also the perfect event for divers to get a reality check on their current skills set and step up their game. During the week there are plenty of opportunities to attending workshops in sidemount diving, line laying, failure drills, ascents, rebreathers, DPVs and much more besides—if it's in the technical diving arena, it's at TEKCamp!

Equipment prizes

In addition, the ever popular raffle prize draw returns with some fabulous high-value equipment up for grabs, courtesy of Apeks, Hollis, BTS and Light For Me. The final night of TEKCamp will wrap up with a full-on Grand Cayman themed party—you'll get to kick back and share some diving stories over a glass of rum as you rub shoulders with diving gods!

If you have not booked your TEKCamp tickets yet then don't fret—there's still time! Two packages are available: a standard ticket and a 'deluxe' ticket for those of you who are particularly keen.

For further information log onto www.tekcamp.co.uk today—but don't hang about because tickets are going fast. ■



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