

# Hopes slim for missing navy divers

By Sandra McCulloch  
Times-Colonist staff

Military investigators looked for reasons while searchers combed the sea Friday for signs of two missing divers following a diving accident off the Sechart Peninsula.

Two divers from the Esquimalt-based HMCS Saskatchewan became separated and apparently drowned. Nicole Patricia Schiele, 22, and Sandy Jacob Schreurs, 21, did not surface during diving exercises near Gibsons on Thursday. A third diver managed to surface and escaped injury.

In a news release, the military said "during the dive an incident occurred and only one diver resurfaced."

It said weather conditions were good, with very light winds. It also said all three were qualified ships' divers.

When notified of the missing divers, the Victoria Rescue Co-ordination Centre called HMCS Restigouche as well as vessels from the RCMP and Coast Guard.

At 11:20 a.m. Friday, the surface and air components of the search were suspended, said VRCC.

Search and Rescue vessels returned to base while the Department of National Defence resources remained at the site to continue the search.

A second diving tender operated by CFB Esquimalt's Fleet Diving Unit arrived at the site Friday evening.

Risks faced by navy divers are many and varied, said a Victoria man who spent years as a ship's diver.

"A lot of things can go wrong," said regional coroner Ian Buckingham in an interview Friday.

In a case like this, the chaplains are in constant contact with the families.

— Otto Van Ek,  
Military Family Resource Centre

Now retired from the military, Buckingham is an experienced diver. He served with the Canadian, U.S. and Royal navies from 1968 to 1986.

He said, "Currents can change drastically. In B.C., currents are fast and divers can't swim very long against a three-knot current."

"You can sink if you're overweight and your buoyancy isn't perfect."

Buoyancy of a diver can change if, say, they pause to pick up some scallops from the sea bottom.

The two missing divers were crew members of the HMCS Saskatchewan. As ships' divers, they would regularly be working on and around the hulls of the naval ships. Ships' divers are often limited to depths of 16 metres.

Buckingham said the usual working depth is 5-10 metres, where divers would inspect the hulls and propellers.

A tragedy involving members of a ship's crew affects the families of the entire ship, said Otto Van Ek, director of the Military Family Resource Centre.

When word of the missing divers came through, Van Ek said a crisis intervention team was put in place.

The families of the three divers

DIVERS A2



Debra Brash/Times-Colonist  
bracing as the house fell.

## Home slips

essini thought the rumbling noise signalled an earthquake.

"I thought it was the big one. I went in and checked the pictures on the wall, it rumbled that much."

"After it stopped, it was really scary," said Andre Dusablon, one of the builder's crew. It was suddenly quiet and no one knew who might have been trapped, he said.

In the backyard, homeowner Debra Wong had been watching the house being lowered, a procedure which he said had gone very smoothly.

The 1912 two-bedroom cottage was worth about \$250,000 with the lot and was in good shape, he said. Sometimes when renovations start, rot shows up but in his house the wood was sound, Wong said.



Bedard's instinct led

## DIVERS Continued from A1

involved were notified. When one diver surfaced, he was put in touch with his family immediately to assure them he was all right.

Van Ek said a support group made up of crewmembers' families is dealing with the tragedy as best it can. Other base resources are available, as well.

"In a case like this, the chaplains are in constant contact with the families."

He said the centre is available to help families cope with the after-effects of the accident.

"In our case, the call comes through, we do what we can."

Buckingham said the sheer practicality of underwater inspections makes divers invaluable to the navy.

"It's so much easier to inspect the hull with a diver than put it into drydock."

Buckingham said, because of the risks, divers should be extremely fit and well trained. "It's

very unusual that they lose navy divers."

One such risk is narcosis, said Buckingham. Divers rely on the "martini law" to keep them out of trouble, which deems that each 50 feet of depth has the equivalent effect on the brain of one martini. Lightheadedness and disorientation can set in at greater depths, making it more difficult to think your way out of a perilous situation.

Normally, divers would be connected by a buddy line and that in itself can be a problem, said Buckingham.

"Sometimes they get into a current that would drive you down and drive you up. Underwater, you don't have any points of reference. You know you're going down because it's getting darker."

If one diver gets into trouble, he can pull another diver into a dangerous situation.

## Washout closes Via section

A washout from heavy rains Friday morning closed the CP Rail line from Port Alberni to Parksville.

Runoff in a region near Cameron Lake that has received heavy snowfall and torrential rain in the past week knocked out part of a

bridge, said CP Rail spokesman Steve Morris.

Morris said no trains were scheduled Friday to use the spur line, which serves the forest industry in Port Alberni.

CP Rail crews headed to the scene Friday afternoon to assess the damage.

## Times-Colonist

### We're listening

#### General inquiries

380-5211

#### New subscription?

General circulation and delivery, 7 a.m.-5:30 p.m. weekdays,  
7 a.m.-noon Saturday and Sunday, phone  
24-hour touch-tone  
In Duncan area  
In Ladysmith, Chemainus area  
In Nanaimo, Lantzville, Nanossee area  
In Port Alberni, Parksville, Qualicum area  
In Courtenay, Comox, Campbell River area

382-2255  
360-1212  
748-2119  
758-8939  
741-1580  
723-4554  
338-5264

Where carriers are available, the subscription rate is \$2.95 weekly. Motor route rates: Three months, \$46.01; six months, \$92.02; 12 months, \$184.04.



Paper damaged or missing? 382-2255

Call customer service before noon.

#### Letters to the editor

Share your views with all Time-Colonist readers. Please sign your letter. An address is required but will not be disclosed in the paper. Include a daytime phone number. Length should be kept to 200 words. Send to "Letters to the Editor" at:

P.O. Box 300  
Victoria, B.C. V8W 2N4

Fax number:  
380-5253

## Poverty f 2% welfa

By Les Leyne  
Times-Colonist staff

B.C.'s welfare rates will be increased by two per cent starting with the March cheques, but an anti-poverty action group said the increase doesn't even keep up with inflation.

An average single parent with two children will see \$23 more, for a total of \$1,175 a month, the Social Services Ministry said Friday. A single employable person's cheque will increase by \$11, to \$546.

The modest increase will add another \$38 million a year to the welfare bill in B.C.

Social Services Minister Joy MacPhail, who has announced several recent measures to cut down on welfare fraud and abuse, said the government can't ignore the fact there are 70,000 families now on welfare, with 118,000 children.

## Fed-B.C. infras worth \$675 mill

The Canadian Press  
Vancouver

The B.C. and federal governments have signed an infrastructure agreement totalling \$675 million.

Premier Harcourt said Friday the deal will create thou-

## Changes i imperative

By Judith Lavoie  
Times-Colonist staff

Every major aspect of forestry in B.C. has to change if the industry is to survive, Forest Minister Andrew Petter told the annual general meeting of the Association of B.C. Professional Foresters on Friday.

"We're facing a series of challenges and problems in our forests, but the future of the industry