

# DIVER Brief



Plates and other artifacts on shelves next to a mess table where a group of lower ranking crew members would have taken their meals



Bottles and other artifacts on a shelf in a cabin on *Terror's* lower deck



A bunk, drawers and shelf in a cabin on *Terror's* lower deck

## UNPRECEDENTED LOOK INSIDE WRECK OF HMS *TERROR*

BY JOSEPH FREY

Parks Canada recently released never-before-seen images and video footage of HMS *Terror* that summarized the 2019 field season on the site. The season focused on the 3D structural mapping of HMS *Terror* and the exploration of the interior of the wreck using a remotely operated vehicle (ROV). Over the course of seven dives, the ROV was able to enter 20 compartments and cabins and take clear photographs of over 90% of the lower deck. The footage is stunning, showing details such as shelving lined with intact bottles, glasses, bowls, and plates in what is believed to be the officers' pantry. Another dive captured footage of the common sailors' living area, clearly providing a glimpse into the Royal Navy's social hierarchy of the mid-Victorian era.

Through a satellite link, DIVER was able to speak with Ryan Harris, who was aboard the Parks Canada's research vessel RV *David Thompson* at the *Terror* site. Ryan is a Parks Canada underwater archaeologist and the project director for the HMS *Erebus* and *Terror* project.

Ryan began by talking about what tantalizing discoveries could be found in

Captain Francis Crozier's desk that could shed further light on what happened to Franklin's expedition. "When we look at Crozier's desk we see that all the drawers are closed and we see a drift of protective sedimentation over the desk, and that all suggests a very high level of preservation for the contents of those drawers.

"We can speculate on the sort of things that we might find inside and the potential for written materials to survive with water temperatures hovering around zero degrees Celsius and the general state of darkness due to the ice cover for much of the year this tends to slow down the aerobic processes of degradation. So with the sediment covering and the closed drawers we hope there is a sufficient anaerobic environment that delicate materials such as textiles and paper might survive.

"Written materials on the ship could shed all kinds of light on what transpired, with a chronology of events of the late stages of the expedition, perhaps shedding light on where the two ships parted company and how they got to their final locations from the point where they were abandoned north west of King William Island in 1848."

Unlike the research seasons of 2016 and 2017 when water clarity was poor and 2018 when ice interfered with the expedition, this year's dive conditions and remarkable water quality permitted Parks Canada underwater archaeologists to make 48 dives down to *Terror* and clearly observe the ship's hull.

For the first time they were able to observe that the ship's propeller was in its operating position. This is significant, as it suggests—with other clues—that *Terror* was likely re-manned after it was initially abandoned in Victoria Strait and was in operating trim when it unexpectedly sank. "The wrecking was not particularly violent as it settled almost vertically on the seafloor," said Ryan.

With plans to bring Parks Canada's dive support barge to the *Terror* site next year we may only be one research season away from recovering documentation that finally fills in the details of Franklin's ill-fated expedition and one of the world's most enduring polar expedition mysteries.

As a member of the 2014 Parks Canada-led Expedition that discovered Sir John Franklin's flagship HMS *Erebus*, I remember thinking at the time, "Now that we've located *Erebus*, the odds are that Franklin's other ship, *Terror*, will be found crushed and scattered on the seafloor off the west coast of King William Island." So two years later when *Terror* was discovered, it came as a surprise to hear that the ship was intact and off the south coast of King William Island, and—ironically—in Terror Bay. [ ]

For more on Parks Canada and their work with the wrecks of HMS *Terror* and HMS *Erebus*, visit: [www.pc.gc.ca](http://www.pc.gc.ca)