

# Thar she blows: frigate scuttled



**KA-BOOM:** The former HMNZS Canterbury goes under.

By Alice Hudson

**THE BUILD-UP** was huge. Nine months of planning, a delayed explosion date, another hour's delay yesterday — but then... ka-boom. In just four minutes the ex-HMNZS Canterbury had disappeared into her watery grave.

The Bay of Islands' newest tourist attraction now lies under about 30m of sparkling water in Deep Water Cove. The resulting artificial reef is expected to boost tourism by 15-20 per cent and become a divers' playground.

Yesterday's scuttling was a happy occasion — though charged with emotion for many. The frigate had served the country for 35 years before being taken out of commission in 1995.

Norm Greenall was chief petty officer when the Canterbury was launched in 1970. He was visibly moved by yesterday's scuttling, with its pyrotechnics, smoke and bagpipes playing *Amazing Grace*.

"She was the best ship I ever served on. This is very emotional, it's hugely hard," he said before the detonation.

Greenall had helped with previous scuttlings of frigates, including the HMNZS Waikato. "This one has been the most emotional of all."

Commander Andrew Ford, who had brought the ship back from East Timor, said committing the vessel to the deep would ensure she served a whole new purpose for many years.

"This is a very moving time for those who have served on this vessel."

More than 3000 people had served on the frigate, project manager and chairman of the Bay of Islands Canterbury Trust Richard Witehira told the *Herald on Sunday*. The trust had spent close to \$700,000 on the project.

The scuttling would be a boon for tourism and economic development, he said. "It provides a chance for small businesses to take people down and swim through a beautiful vessel. Economic development for our people I believe is very important."

Yesterday's scuttling was a grand occasion, attracting a spectator flotilla of 300 to 400 boats, including several large hospitality launches. Helicopters buzzed overhead, as the official detonation time of 2.30pm came and went while last-minute safety checks were made to ensure no one was within the 500m safety exclusion zone.

Local kaumatua, Northland MP



Dover Samuels, media and special guests with strong ties to the ship were allowed on board for a prayer ceremony before detonation. Inside, the Canterbury smelled of diesel, its walls spotted with graffiti.

The engine room, galley and shell room had already been carefully flooded and holes had been cut into its sides, said chief firing officer Keith Simpson. This ensured the explosives imported from the United States would cause as little damage as possible to the frigate as it fell to the sea floor.

Fourteen-year-old diver and former sea cadet Lucy Hamnett got to "stomp my foot" and detonate the explosives with a foot pedal, from a nearby vessel. Her parents, who moved here two months ago from Britain, had paid \$19,200 in a charity auction for the privilege.

There were a few gasps and tense moments as the ship slowly sank, listing dangerously to one side. Sighs of relief were audible as the vessel suddenly righted itself and slipped smoothly underwater.

Paul Morris, founder of website Dive Planet, and his son Peter Morris helped strip the boat in preparation for the scuttling.

Paul Morris said divers from all over the world would enjoy exploring the wreck. "There will be up to 60m visibility, and there isn't much of a current, so there won't be too much stirring up down at the bottom. Open water divers are going to go down there and go 'wow... so that's what a wreck really looks like!'"

It would also be an exciting underwater playground for junior divers, he said. The foremast, or topmost part of the frigate, would sit 6m below the surface.

Divers were waiting in their wetsuits for the all-clear to start exploring yesterday.

To order photos of the sinking of the Canterbury go to [www.newspix.co.nz](http://www.newspix.co.nz) and click "latest pic".



**SINKING FEELING:** The Canterbury goes down in four minutes. DOUG SHEPPARD