



Remote vehicle goes where divers cannot

by Nancy Colagiaco

Québec Provincial Police used the same technology as James Cameron on *Titanic* to locate underwater wreckage and bodies after a recent plane crash.

Two men set out on a float plane bound for a fishing camp last June, leaving Baie-Comeau on a Tuesday and due back Friday. When they didn't return as scheduled a worried relative set out to look for them and found debris from their plane on Lac Berthé, approximately 200 kilometers north of Baie Comeau. Quite certain it was his relative's plane, he contacted police.

Québec Provincial Police divers were called in for a search and rescue mission. They found a piece of the plane's tail and not much more. Divers quickly realized they would need specialized equipment and called Mike Roberts of Divetech, a Nova Scotia underwater survey company. Roberts and his team were pleased to help.

"It's always a great feeling to help bring closure to the families and another to know we can rely on our technology to perform in important situations like these," said Roberts. Divetech uses a remotely operated vehicle known as the Video Ray to locate and retrieve underwater wreckage.

They found the remains of the aircraft at a depth of 70 metres. Police divers then took over, recovering the pilot and the passenger from inside the airplane.

Roberts can mobilize a team 24/7, 365 days a year. His team is always eager to help bring closure, especially in tragic circumstances like these.

How it works

The Video Ray is an underwater search tool propelled by thrusters and can travel as fast as 4.1 knots. It's computer operated with controllers much like those on video games, making it easy enough for even a child to operate.

The ROV (remote operated vehicle) is connected to a surface ship by a cable that provides electrical power and transmits commands to move the craft and operate the colour underwater video camera. Depending on the situation, a mechanical arm may be installed to pick up objects.

The Video Ray may be used for sonar imaging and in low visibility or hazardous environments and situations that are too dangerous or polluted for divers to explore. It can perform

in warm waters and freezing temperatures, unlike traditional scuba diving where underwater time is limited due to shortage of oxygen and unforeseen risks.

ROVs have been used worldwide by police, coastguard and movie companies, for fishing and sea life surveys of the ocean floor, to install and repair undersea telecommunication cables and in off shore oil and gas drilling projects.

They do not replace police officers but make their work more efficient, not only in search and rescue missions but also in criminal investigations. Many cases were left unresolved for lack of evidence retrieval; this tool now enables officers

to pursue investigations in a faster and safer way.

Video Ray assisted police in a massive marijuana bust in Jamaica. Police, coast guards and port security, including the largest anthropology laboratory in the US, have used ROVs for recovery and retrieval missions. Fishing expeditions and researchers have also benefitted from ROVs.

Contact **Mike Roberts** at divetech@eastlink.ca for more information.

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