

## A TREASURED INCIDENT

(Contributed)

We were diving on the remains of this wreck, using an air lift to suck the pay dirt from inside the wall. Dick was down first, followed by Tom (who got hooked up in the blower drum float on his way to the surface when the sucker pulled out of the drum). Then it was my turn to go down. I sucked along the outside of the ship's plate we had discovered until my DCP got into the first red square. Then I gave three tugs on the rope for the drum to be pulled up. It was so heavy that they thought it was caught up on something and slacked away again. I rushed to the surface to tell them to keep on winching, then went back down to 50 feet and checked that all was alright before surfacing. I was telling Tom what to do on his next dive when I suddenly felt a little bit funny. I said "Hold on, lads, I feel queer." Then I noticed my right arm was going numb and that I could not move my fingers - my arm felt like a dead log of wood. My thinking was unimpaired and I told them to hurry and get me a new tank and get me back in the water quickly, with someone to come with me also. I could not put my flippers on or mask. Finally I had all gear on. The weight belt was hard to get on. My legs seemed weak, but it could have been nervousness. Tom threw the pay dirt drum, on a rope, into the water and I fell over the side with Harry.

We sank down with the drum, Harry holding my arm. We reached bottom at 100 feet and within a minute my arm came right. It was a great relief to move my fingers and feel with them. My legs seemed OK again, too. After about 2-3 minutes we started slowly up the rope. Harry had a depth gauge. We ascended to 60 feet and spent about 2 minutes there, then I asked him to get a watch. He went to the surface and I started slowly working my way to the surface up the rope, taking 5 minutes to reach 30 feet. I spent 5 minutes at 30 feet, 10 at 25 feet, 20 at 20 feet, 20 at 15 feet, 20 at 10 feet, 10 at 5 feet and then surfaced OK. Total time of dive treatment had been 1 hour 35 minutes.

It is hard to say just what went through my mind. For a start I was worried, for I remembered other bends cases I'd heard about, and I was worried about what my wife would think. Then when I reached the bottom it all seemed unreal, I felt so fine. But I knew that if I went straight up to the surface I would be worse than ever, and even going slowly I might get it again at say 30 feet. It was miserably cold when I was by myself but when someone else was with me time passed more quickly. Harry arrived with a watch: till then I kept thinking of all the bad things that may happen and kept wondering if my hand was tingling with cold or was it bends coming on again. For a start the time at 30 feet to 20 feet passed very slowly, every minute seemed like an hour. But after a while it seemed to speed up. I was quite cold though not shivering, and the water was opaque like green soup. Dick and Harry swapped duties as "nurse" and gave me a new tank, which I held between my legs. Just having something like a tank to look at helped pass the time.

After I finally surfaced I took my gear off except for the wetsuit, and waited for any symptoms to return. The others wanted to go but I decided we would make the most of a bad day by pulling up the metal plate with the portholes. We nearly tipped the boat over with a double purchase on the davits. Eventually we got it slung beneath the boat from both sides and slowly steamed ashore, arriving just in time to winch the boat out and pull the plate to land. Then home, showered, lunch and back to the ramp to remove the portholes from the plate, afterwards working on garden pump and boat bilge pump.

During decompression treatment Dick came down with a good 3-diamond ring from my pay

dirt bucket to cheer me up ... it did give me a burst, too.

Perhaps the worst parts were the initial feeling of impending disaster as my arm went numb and the thought that symptoms could come back as I ascended after coming OK at 100 feet. My thoughts? I could see the boat above but was unable to go there, it was Taboo Country.

*(The writer of this account kindly gave permission for it to be published. Names have been changed, the facts are as related. It may be of both interest and help for diving doctors to hear the patient's story. This tale can be interpreted to show many lessons and at least two diagnoses. The victim of this tale has heard Dr Carl Edmonds talk on the in-water treatment by oxygen, but only since the incident occurred.)*

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#### AVIATION SAFETY, WINGED AESCULAPIUS

It isn't every day that an invitation comes to join a class of pilots on an air medicine course. I arrived just in time to enter the compression chamber and "go up" to 24,000 feet before taking off the oxygen mask to learn the feel of oxygen lack, to be recorded by pencil on a pad ..... nearly illegible before oxygen was resumed.

Everyone talks flying all the time. We saw a lot of films ... how to survive on a tropical island; when and how to use a variety of ejector seats (they never practice using them, as crush fractures of lumbar vertebrae are a real hazard).

The old pilots (in their thirties) speak critically of the younger generation. "We worked hard to ensure success. Now they don't care if they're scrubbed; they go and do something else. And it's no use threatening young student pilots that they'll get killed if they do the wrong thing. In these days of disposables and inbuilt obsolescence they don't fear death ... so they are taught it will hurt before they die; then they pay attention."

We learned of noise hazards, about spacial disorientation and about night vision. Good pilots are encouraged to lead almost monastic lives. Wine, women and song are all bad news before flying.

*(Extracted from an essay by "Hypophysis" in AMA Gazette, 4 August 1977)*

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#### MARINE RESEARCH

A major expansion of research on the Great Barrier Reef will begin in 1978 with the commissioning of a new \$1.2 million ocean-going research vessel for the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

Funds for research in Australia's Antarctic Territory have been increased from \$6.5 million to \$8.7 million, with the emphasis on marine research.

The Bureau of Meteorology will also be upgraded and intends to deploy drifting buoys in oceans to the south and west of Australia to measure sea surface temperatures and atmospheric pressure.

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