

DEEP DIVING

by Robert Scott

On the 29th September, 1963, South Pacific Divers' Club held a deep dive off the front of Kurnell in 240 feet of water. Only selected members of the club were allowed to partake in this dive.

The reason for the dive being to study and experience Nitrogen Narcosis and also to give a first-hand report on this subject.

The author has found that in previous articles on this phenomenon a number of technical theories have been given as to what may happen but he has not come across any reports as to what happened to each individual.

A roster had been drawn-up previously showing the sequence of divers and also the times as they entered and left the water. The diver either descended with his mate (pairs) or he dived with a group, the latter being four to six people.

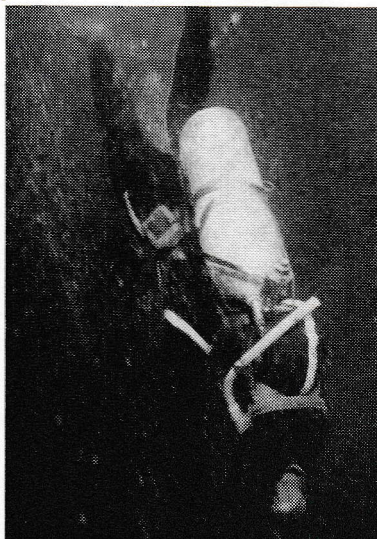
NITROGEN NARCOSIS

Not all divers reached the bottom as some suffered nitrogen narcosis and turned back while others were not affected until the bottom was reached.

The first two divers affected with Nitrogen Narcosis were John Allen and Don Lock. John Allen reported that he received a severe dizziness but his faculties remained the same and that he had a strong desire to return to the surface. This first came on at 160 feet when he lost the power of his arms which felt like lead. Don Lock experienced a feeling of elation but his thinking slowed down and he had a strong urge to keep on going. This feeling was also experienced at the 160 feet level.

Another diver, Bob Quill, stated that he first noticed a numb feeling at 140 feet and did not fully realise what was happening for a few moments until he reached 150 feet. At that stage he had a general numbness all over his body with a slight tingling feeling in his limbs. This feeling was very pleasant and he likened it to going under an anaesthetic. He stated that he felt a strong desire to return to the surface immediately. Upon ascending he was

not sure as to whether he was moving so he grabbed the rope and pulled himself up hand over hand. During this dive he was not completely aware of his thoughts or feelings, and it was only later that he realised what actually had happened. Bob Quill pointed out that he received no warning of his coming attack and suffered no after-effects.



Joan Riley on the way down.

(PHOTOS BY RON TAYLOR)

Denis Robinson stated that he had a great fear of kicking someone's face mask off and a fear of someone kicking his face mask off also, and therefore he had a strong desire to get away from everyone and did not want any interference from other people.



The trawler "Nola" was the centre of the deep dive operations.

QUEER FEELINGS

Three other divers and myself descended to a depth of 210 feet before I experienced any sensation. This happened after we had stopped to give the O.K. signal. I proceeded to clear my mask of water and I turned to descend further when a most bewildering feeling came over my whole body very suddenly. My first thought was that if I descended deeper this strange feeling would go away, but on descending another 15 feet the feeling grew stronger. I felt that I must stop and that I could not continue descending for ever. I stopped at that depth and without any apparent reason signalled to my mates to ascend. With great effort I pulled myself up the line hand over hand and later realised it would have been easier to swim-up but I had, in fact, forgotten to do so. At a depth of about 180 feet I realised there were only three divers instead of four and I looked frantically for the bubbles of the fourth diver. When I could not see them I became worried and attempted to inform the other divers that there was one diver missing. I felt that it was utterly ridiculous that they did not know I had this feeling and I could not impress upon them that there was one missing. My condition was getting worse and I tried to think of a way that I could write in the water with my finger. I then realised it would never work so I pointed to each diver and held up a finger for each of them I pointed to.

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When I reached four they realised there was one missing and began looking around. I signalled I was going to surface and they were to follow me. As I rose this strange feeling became very strong and I stopped at different levels and forgot where I was. I realised where I was as each diver came into my vision. I had no sensation of breathing and felt a cold glow throughout my whole body. As the water was clear I could see a fair distance and thought that I could swim away and live for ever. We started ascending the line and I thought how silly it was that the other diver should get lost and I started laughing to myself. I thought that this was not right so I stopped. I felt as if I was not exhaling or inhaling, that the air was passing in and out of my mouth in a continuous flow.

While ascending I looked up and could see the surface which looked only 30 feet away but I realised later that it must have been at least 100 feet. After seeing the surface I immediately thought that this feeling should pass away but it did not. The feeling stayed with me right to the surface and even after leaving the water but it was not as bad as whilst in the water.

DANGEROUS DIVER

After five minutes back on deck I decided to jump back in the water and watch the other divers descend. After swimming over to the anchor line I met one of the next two divers and he asked me had I seen his mate as they had both jumped into the water together. I shouted to those on board enquiring as to the other diver's whereabouts and received a negative answer but was told there were bubbles coming up 50 yards from the boat. I swam over to where the bubbles were and descended, hoping to catch up with this other diver descending on his own without a line to guide him. At approximately 120 feet down I felt the cold glow coming on again and had to surface. I called out for assistance and dived again to 100 feet and levelled out. I started following the other diver's bubble line. Ahead of me I saw a mass of bubbles rising to the surface and another line of bubbles joining these at an angle. (A strong northern current was moving down the coast.) By this time I was really worried and



Peter Harper holds a marine growth taken off the bottom at 241 ft. off Kurnell, N.S.W.

knew that there was no way that I could ever help him. One of the other divers descended towards me and I waved him to level out as there was a diver ascending amid a stream of vertical bubbles. As this diver came past I grabbed hold of him and pointed down whereupon he thought I wanted to dive down with him again. This other diver was affected by nitrogen narcosis and could not comprehend what I was trying to point out. I then let him go to the surface. Just then as I looked down the bubbles ceased coming to the surface and I thought that we had really lost a diver, little realising that the diver I had seen coming up from the bottom was the diver we had been looking for. **This diver had descended without utilising the shot line and had also descended upon his own without telling anyone of his intention to do so, thereby risking his and other divers' lives.**

A great deal has been learnt from this dive and a number of questions have been raised. They are:

1. *How did it come about that all divers remembered what happened?*

The books tell us that there is a loss of memory after ascending.

2. *Why did this feeling stay with some of the divers all the way to the surface?*

It has been previously stated that upon ascending the effects disappear.

3. *Could blood pressure have any effect, as the diver would be in an inverted position for an extended period of time?*

4. *Has the amount of breathing effort anything to do with the effects of nitrogen narcosis becoming apparent sooner?*

5. *Why was it that a number of divers were affected suddenly and without warning?*

6. *Was this Nitrogen Narcosis?*

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