

undercurrent[®]

THE PRIVATE, EXCLUSIVE GUIDE FOR SERIOUS DIVERS

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Barbados, West Indies

--Don't Follow The Stars

Dear Reader,

Is it my imagination that the marketing of dive travel is relying more and more on selling the entrepreneur who runs the operation? It seems to me that we divers have our own Colonel Sanders, our Orville Redenbacher, our Joe Isuzu. Our entrepreneurs-cum celebrities are Peter Hughes, Neal Watson, and Carl Roessler; they're Alan and Eva Baskin, Don Foster, and Ron Kipp. Their smiling faces assure me that they're lovely folks who will bust butt to give me the best diving they have. I suppose Cayman's Bob Soto started it all, and his name is still in lights, though he long ago sold out. Then again, maybe we have Cap'n Don Stewart to thank.

Anyhow, it's one thing to have your name on your own dive hut, and quite another to have sold it to a corporation, as did Peter Hughes, now Vice President of Divi Hotels. Divi wanted his name because they want us divers to follow the Hughes' star where ever it shines. After all I think his operation at Bonaire, for the number of divers it serves, does a splendid job. We have given high marks in the past to the Tiara Beach and to the liveboard Sundancer. As the Divi chain expands one should have every reason to expect great results -- or so one would think.

On Barbados, with two Divi Hotels extant on different sides of the island, I anticipated a good show. Barbados is a super tourist island; some exceptional hotels, scores of good restaurants (in the Caribbean a "good restaurant" would not fare well against a "good restaurant" in New York, Los Angeles, or even Seattle). There are sandy beaches, parachute pulls, and sunset pirate cruises (one of which I almost boarded until I surveyed the clump of people lined up for a "true" Caribbean experience aboard a boat with all the free booze they could down). Yes, Barbados nearly has it all -- including residents who are friendly and fair. Even the beach vendors will leave you alone -- after you say "no" three times.

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But when I went there years ago (see May, 1984) I found the diving inadequate to consider Barbados a primary destination for serious divers (although I did find one first rate dive operator.) Now, with Divi's celebrity advertising underway, I wondered whether they had put together something that had not been done four years ago -- or would my readers be better off this time not following the star.

In mid-June I called Divi to make reservations at the St. James, asking if the shop was open. "Yes," I was told, "it has been open since February." I made reservations and bright and early one July morning, I presented myself at the St. James watersports shack. A bored young lady told me that the dive shop had not opened ... that the compressor had been misshipped and was floating around the Caribbean (I later heard different explanations from two other people, both of whom claimed the compressor was there). I took a moment to collect my wits (after all, had I known this I would not have made my journey), then asked about diving at the Hughes' shop at the Divi Southwinds. I could be picked up by van an hour before each dive, but that could require as many as four hours for a single tank! (Jolly Roger Watersports is less than five minutes away, but as a competitor it was not mentioned). I reported to the St. James desk and asked to be transferred to the Southwinds. They graciously complied, though a room would not be ready until the following day. The bottom line -- two days lost. (Upon my return -- mid-July -- I called Divi reservations, asked for the Divi St. James desk, asked if the dive shop was open, and was told yes. I called the St. James Watersports shack. I asked if the shop was open and I was told they have scuba and can arrange a trip, but when I repeated the question I was told the shop wasn't open. I called Divi to inform them of the discrepancy so other divers won't follow the wrong star.)

The St. James is a comfortable hotel, a sort of yuppie installation; no children are allowed. Everyone sat around the pool, rather than on the narrow beach where coral clumps make swimming difficult. The Southwinds, a several story pleasant condominium-like complex seemed similar to complexes in many American suburbs. Kids play in the pool, adults recline on the excellent beach. Peter Hughes' Underwater Barbadoes (PHUB) is a ten minute walk from any Southwinds room, down St. Lawrence Gap road lined with restaurants and bars. The pleasant young woman behind the counter offered me several package deals, but I preferred the fewest number of dives. She tried to upgrade me by explaining that the more dives I sign up for in advance, the lower the cost per dive -- but the hook is that they are nonrefundable and nontransferable. I met more than one disappointed diver on a budget who felt unfairly stuck with dives they didn't

Truk Lagoon Revisited

To correct the jumbled mess I created a couple of issues ago, let me tell you with whom I would dive if I were headed to Truk Lagoon.

The main man is Clark Graham. His dive shop is Micronesia Aquatics. A number of visiting divers, apparently assisted by some professional dive guides, have been trying to pry loose artifacts from the wrecks in the Lagoon. Graham is a leader in the fight to keep the World War II ships intact.

For information or reservations to dive with Graham, you can write him at PO Box 57, Truk Lagoon, East Caroline Islands, 96942.

C.C., travel editor

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care to use. They couldn't afford to find alternative diving. Given the quality of diving here, that's pretty cheesy.

I asked for the 2:30 dive (they go at 9:30 and 12:30 as well) but it was filled. So was tomorrow morning's deep dive. (Hey, here's a serious diver losing another day of diving!) I settled for 12:30 tomorrow -- if this were Bonaire I could at least go off the beach.

The shop itself is well organized with ample room to store gear. To join a dive one grabs his gear and weights, lugs them across a narrow street, down a couple of cement steps, and wades 50 feet to the waiting boat. My dive was about 10 minutes away and after gearing up and getting a briefing (forget about using your Edge; time and depth is determined by the divemaster) and instructions to stick together, we entered the water one by one. We had to wait on the drag line until everyone was in. We were then instructed to descend. Every dive was run the same way.

I was unimpressed with this dive (and most others). Though gorgonia and soft coral were ubiquitous, the colorless reef was virtually bereft of anything but aquarium-sized tropicals; we saw nary a fish over a foot, not an eel, not much anything of interest beyond an angel and a couple of spotted drum. The coral cast a brown pall, due surely in part to 30-40 foot visibility. Our divemaster watched my buddy team and another carefully for 40 of the first 50 minutes, then disappeared in the murk, requiring me to surface twice to get a bearing on the boat. That's no big deal to me, however PHUB is geared for inexperienced and resort divers; another guide disappeared the following day.

On 5 out of 7 days, the 12:30 dive was staged on one of two similar reefs, in low visibility, close enough to the hotel so that the boat could get back to fill up with beginners for the 2:30 dive, usually held in shallow 20 foot water. Only the morning dive is for more serious divers, where at depths of 80 or 90 feet one could drop below the bad visibility and get some action.

The big attraction at Barbados is the Stavronikita, a 365 foot Greek freighter intentionally sunk ten years ago. I dived it four years ago and expected it now to be a grand dive, but it still remains relatively stark -- not much coral has taken root -- and underpopulated -- except for sergeant majors. Bottom time was set at 90 feet for 20 minutes with a three minute stop, and one was to play follow the leader (though I broke away from the pack for a little penetration). This 365-foot ship is an interesting dive, but the sort of exploration allowed by the guides doesn't permit much more than a superficial look. The PHUB boat had anchored about 40 feet from the wreck, but when the dive ended we took our decompression stop on a line directly above the mast. I

Don't Leave Home Without It

Mid air between San Francisco and Miami on my way to Barbados I had a panic attack. Although I normally leave my c-card with my dive gear, I had left my card at home. Would I be permitted to dive at what I was sure was a highly regimented shop? Would I have to demonstrate my skills in the pool to an 18-year-old snorkel instructor? Would I have to clear my mask, fail, and come up coughing in front of a gaggle of gaping tourists?

My quick thinking partner saved me from great humiliation. Call home and have it FAXED to the Divi hotel, she said. Sure enough, when I arrived there was a facsimile awaiting for me.

As it turned out, no one in Barbados asked to see my c-card. Nonetheless, I didn't have to worry that every where I went I would have to be examined.

More and more hotels are using FAX machines to communicate making it simple to send documents back and forth.

If you forget your American Express travelers checks well, that would qualify you as a counterfeiter if you tried to spend the fax -- a fax would help you get the check numbers to get replacements.

figured the boat must have drifted over the wreck, but it turned out we were hanging from another boat's line. We surfaced and a couple of divers almost boarded the wrong boat. All a big joke if we were diving from the Sea Dancer, but on Barbados these are a lot of first time divers.

The Stavronikita can be a super dive if you're on your own with a computer in hand. That's why serious divers need to know about other dive operations -- all of which are owned by individuals, but not one of which has the person's name in the title. The Dive Shop, located near the Grand Barbados Beach Resort not far from Bridgetown, is owned by Paki Decia, whose son Haroon, a master instructor, is my favorite guide on Barbados. He does his all to find the better reefs for serious divers. I dived with him on my first trip to Barbados and believe he still offers serious divers the best service. To me, one of the treats of Barbados is to dive in the harbor to search for century-old bottles, which my buddy and I successfully did on one dive with Haroon. Although Haroon will seek more distant reefs and bigger fish (he's found a couple of new ones, he told me, and has been seeing mantas), his father laments the decline of big fish, believing it's mainly due to spearfishing. He recounted how years ago it was quite common to see 60-70 pound snappers on the reefs. Today there are none. He told me that big fish had once begun to reside in the Stavronikita, but they disappeared at the hands of hunters. Paki says the dive operators are working with the government to ban spearfishing in many areas accessible to sport divers. It might take a couple of years.

One dive operation is lead by a hunter, who took a gun with him on both dives I joined. Ram Edghill, a native Barbadian of European stock, works a quarter mile down the road from PHUB at the Sandy Beach hotel. His Scotch and Soda is well-equipped for diving and charter fishing. While PHUB has to be punctual to get 3 dives a day, the swashbuckling Ram operates more on island time. Once he got his craft underway he was all business. A half mile off shore, he offered spearguns to his three passengers, then announced: "Let's go diving. We don't put down the anchor. We jump overboard, head down to the reef, which is 80 or 90 feet, and take a look. The boat will find our bubbles."

It was a good reef, with a thermocline at 80 feet, the water above carrying a murky 30 foot visibility, the water below 60 feet. I floated in the gentle current, seeing no big fish, but I teased a nice file fish, got close to a small turtle, and watched a nice school of blue chromis file by. A couple dives a day like this (which you can get from Haroon or Ram) would make Barbados acceptable. At the end of the dive Ram arrived on the surface with a three foot barracuda perfectly speared. He cracked open his cooler, offering beer or soda to his passengers. On Wednesday and Friday shallow dives, he has a party afterward. A likeable chap, he's unlikely to be one of the operators fighting to close the reefs to spearfishing. After all, he's been fishing them all his life and the fish he gets become his dinner.

I dived with Ram, Haroon and Paki, but didn't get the chance to dive with a little storefront operation at the Witchdoctor's Restaurant, a hundred feet from PHUB. They take four dives in their 16 foot boat. Two divers and one dive operator told me that they hit the better reefs to attract experienced divers from the Hughes operation. If you find yourself at Divi and can't get on a Hughes dive boat -- or don't want to -- go next door and cut a deal.

As for Barbados, it's an excellent tourist island, with plenty of reasons for the stars to fall there. It has first class hotels; Sam Lords Castle and Shady Lane; Heywoods, to the north of the island has a dive shop and dives different reefs; there's dive services at the Paradise Beach Hotel, the Barbados

12-Foot Tiger Shark Speared In The Keys

His tank of air expended, George Rockett III surfaced next to his boat in the Gulf of Mexico. It had been a fruitful dive, another day at the ocean office of Rockett and Mark Rackely. Commercial spearfishermen who sell to restaurants in Key West, they had shot enough grouper and cobia to please more than a few palates.

Treading water 45 miles off Big Pine Key, Rockett stuck his head underwater one last time. What he saw startled him. Gliding silently beneath his feet was the biggest tiger shark he had ever seen in 19 years of diving. "The fish was unbelievable. It came up and looked at me on the surface. It was the first time I was ever really scared."

Nervous at the possibility of becoming an hors d'oeuvre, Rockett carefully aimed his speargun and fired. His powerhead pierced the tiger shark's flesh, and the shark fled to the bottom 60 feet below.

The water was crystal clear, so Rockett was able to follow the 12-foot fish by swimming above it on the surface. In the next 30 minutes or so, Rockett shot it three more times. Rackley, following by boat, dived in and shot it once, too.

When the tiger shark expired, the two tied it to the side of the 21-foot boat.

"It was just like the 'Old Man and the Sea'" Rockett said. "The only difference is that he caught his fish on hook and line and I shot mine with a spear."

It took Rockett and Rackley 11 hours that day in early June to tow the shark 45 miles to the Dolphin Marina in Big Pine Key. Unlike Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea," no other sharks showed to share dinner.

"When you spear fish, you have to expect sharks," said Rockett, a 24-year-old who learned to snorkel at age 3, started diving at age 5, and earned his scuba certification at age 8. "It's just part of the game. Over the years, I shot 10-foot hammerheads and 400-pound bull sharks, but none of those fish ever scared me."

The scale at Dolphin Marine stops at 800 pounds and Rockett's shark took it all the way. He estimates the total weight at 1100 pounds.

Rockett is having the tiger shark mounted. It

will cost him roughly \$1,700.

"To hell with it," Rockett said. "It's worth it. It was a magnificent fish."

The shark, a female carrying 41 nearly fully developed babies, had recently ingested two loggerhead turtles and horseshoe crab, about 200 pounds worth in Rockett's estimation.

Sharks generally keep their distance, Rockett said. But when one as big as this tiger shark takes sudden interest, there is not much time to debate whether the shark is friend or foe.

I don't play with them," he said. "I shoot them. I'm a hunter and it's a challenge."

In the last few years, he says, the business of using sharks for food was undergone a boom. Restaurants pay 85 cents a pound for shark meat. The fins from a lemon or bull shark can bring \$60 to \$300 alone from fanciers of shark fin soup.

"I don't waste them," Rockett said. "For years, people have caught them and killed them and thrown them away. I never do that."

Rockett realizes there are individuals who will not find spearing sharks to be good sport. Many folks find spearing any fish distasteful. Rockett says that it's not only sporting, but it's also more selective and more difficult than using rod and reel.

"When you are diving, you can pick out the fish that you want," Rockett said. "You are not indiscriminately hooking fish on the bottom and hauling them to the surface. A second thing is that people can fish all the time, regardless of water visibility. In the winter, the water in the Gulf is too dirty for me to dive in. Fishermen are able to fish all year."

"Diving and spear fishing are terrific. Every day is a new adventure."

*Marty Klinkenberg
Miami News*

Eds. note: Rockett's trophy will be mounted outside the shop his father opened 20 years ago: Underseas dive shop in Pine Key, at mile marker 30.5. Rockett's mother, who now manages it, told *Undercurrent* that the shark should be on display sometime in October.

Hilton and the Coral Reef Club. And there are plenty of inexpensive hotels: e.g. while Divi will run you well over \$100/night in the summer, a little three story hotel, the Spinnaker, 100 feet from Hughes -- where Ram has an office -- has \$25 basic rooms with balconies over the small lagoon.

My stay at the Divi Southwinds was quite pleasant; I prefer the beach rooms to the suites in the multi-storied buildings because the beach is so nice.

There's tennis and tours, bars and music and shops nearby. A prepaid meal plan will prove disappointing, since many nearby restaurants (Pisces and David's lead the list) offer superior cuisine. And, there is even a Divi manager's cocktail party with something other than rum punch. The Southwinds manager, when I told him I had come to Southwinds because the St. James dive shop wasn't open, said "I'm surprised. I thought that shop had been open for some time."

But even when the shop opens, I can't recommend that you use it. If you come to Barbados for a week, consider taking a half a dozen dives. Give your business to Paki and Haroon, have a go with Ram, maybe even walk over to the Witchdoctor.

Peter Hughes is a super diver, well-liked in the industry, and has become a good corporate businessman with Divi. When we have to write about an operation with his name on it, his name inadvertently gets dragged around. I guess that's business. Maybe Peter can follow the star of Colonel Sanders, who sold his chicken business to the corporate giants. Years later, as the empire expanded, the Colonel got more and more distant from the shops. He ventured into one and ordered up a drumstick. "Worst damn chicken I ever ate," he said, and according to the legend, went home and worked up his own batch. Maybe Peter can whip up another liveboard or two for us serious divers, and leave Divi Barbados for the resort course divers.

Divers Compass: A car is handy for getting around; the mini-Moke, an open jeep-like contraption, is the rage: they can only be rented when you're on the island and they're in short supply during high season, so ask your hotel ahead of time to help arrange a rental. . . .To dive with Haroon, call 809/426-9777 (POB 44B, St. Michael, Barbados); with Ram call 809/428-7308 or 0733); to contact Divi 800/367-3464. . . .Summer water temperature was a constant 83oF. . . .The basic price for a single tank is \$30 US.

C.C., travel editor

Reports From Our Readers, Part II

--Bonaire Is As Solid As Ever?

Dear Reader,

This month I had promised a reader update from Belize, but decided to dispatch a correspondent to Ambergis Caye for a first hand report. So let us venture to Bonaire, a Caribbean leader in dive travel.

BONAIRE: Everyone dives the same locations because there is a gentleman's agreement among the shops to tie up the permanent reef moorings (although last time I was there I saw a Bruce Bowker boat off on its own). There's great macro life, nice hard and soft corals, and a wide variety of tropicals -- but not much in the way of big thrills, though an occasional turtle or ray might slide by. As Barb Agustin (Chicago) writes: "All the dive sites seemed the same. By Wednesday we couldn't remember anything about the dives Sunday." Nonetheless it's an excellent destination for photographers; nearly everyone offers overnight processing and the macro and fish life provide unending subjects. Everybody offers unlimited diving, day or night, right off their beachfront. It can be pretty damn good. A dry and desert island -- because centuries ago its tropical

forests were plundered -- the people are pleasant, the diving easy, the hotels and services acceptable. But it's getting busy. Many favorite sites can't be dived because another boat has gotten there first. Scores of new moorings are being placed, to alleviate the problem. Bonaire is developing rapidly. It won't be the same place in ten years -- maybe not in five.

Bonaire Beach Hotel, where the Bonaire Scuba Center resides, is a resort hotel and caters to nondiving tour groups. It has the only real beach on the island. Says P.T. Christensen (St. Catharines, Ont.) "Hotel front desk staff and bar staff indifferent -- would ignore guests and serve them when good and ready. Found the same indifferent attitude with the dive store staff but not the divemasters. Hotel is government-operated, which accounts for their 'we don't give a damn' attitude. Cayman diving and people are very much better." Al Bay (Athens, GA) was there in March. "Food and service at restaurant very poor. Condition of hotel not at all impressive -- front desk uncooperative, apathetic. Personnel in dive shop, especially manager, not too friendly, although divemasters were OK. NOTE: divemasters did not preach or practice no-hands diving -- even noticed divemasters standing on coral. Will return to Bonaire, but not to Bonaire Beach."

Captain Don Stewart discovered Bonaire reefs in the 1960's and has led the movement to preserve them. When I first dived with him he used inflated condoms to mark the reef ("Got them from Planned Parenthood," he told me, "and the damn things still sprung leaks.") and wore a red ribbon for a depth gauge, ... he could tell how deep he was by the color it turned. He still holds forth at the comfortable Habitat bar where he may or may not still have a financial interest. One doesn't have to stay in funky units any more. Captain Don's Villa's are right out of Costa del Sol. Says reader Cliff Miller (Rochester, VT) about last year's trip. "We wanted a non-structured dive vacation. That's what we got. Capt. Don's is tops! A real efficient operation. No

The Nikonos Seminar

Dear *Undercurrent*,

"In your January issue, you published a less-than-enthusiastic review of the Nikonos Seminar in Bonaire. I would like to share my experience at the Seminar given February 27 to March 5, 1988.

The morning of the seminar at the Flamingo, instructor, Scott Frier, from Nikon, was at the photo shop to give us the overview and definitive outline of the course.

Scott offered a vigorous seminar with plenty of information. He had only three students, however, that was clearly to our advantage. He had planned the course to coincide with our dives. The Dive Shop provided us with our own boat and two enthusiastic and energetic divemasters. On every one of our dives, Scott was there to assist us and on almost every dive, came over to us to help us set up a picture based on our previous lecture.

Every afternoon at 5:00 P.M., we would meet to go over our morning's photographs. He would critique the photos and assist us in obtaining the necessary Nikon accessories for the next dive.

The lectures were serious and had the ingredients of academics, philosophy and cook book material for all levels of students.

Although our initial enthusiasm was dampened by your article, we were not disappointed. We hope that our note, following your article, will encourage people to attend these seminars. This might encourage Nikon to present additional lectures of a more advanced nature."

Dr. Elliot S. Taynor
Port Jefferson Station, NY

Dear Dr. Taynor,

I'm delighted that your course worked so well. A number of the points we made in the article -- that I received no assistance underwater, that there was no truly formal critique of photographs, etc. -- seemed to have been corrected. I can't help but think our critique helped Nikon and Dive shape things up a bit.

The Nikonos Seminar has great potential and perhaps it's now being achieved. Because a visitor pays no additional fee to the Flamingo Beach for the instruction, gets relatively private dive boats, and can use all that exciting Nikon gear free.

Divers may contact Aquaventure International, POB 237, Waitsfield, VT, 05673 (800/345-0322 or 802/496-5581) for further information.

C. C., travel editor

regimentation, no cattle boats. An average of eight divers per boat. A diver's resort for divers, by divers. Good reefs in front of Habitat!" Bill Deane, New York, says "Shore diving is best. You don't need a boat. In fact, I only bothered with a boat dive once. Rent a car and dive the island. But clarity & abundance of fish not as spectacular as Grand Cayman. Also, not as colorful. The bad storm of last year killed a lot of the shallow coral in front of Habitat. Call Budget in advance as rental cars are limited." Fred Taylor (Marietta, GA) adds, "Dive sites not as good as 5+ years ago -- maybe this is progress? Captain Don still a character. Help friendly & competent. Our gear was lost for 24 hours -- they gave us excellent loaner equipment free of charge -- told us to keep it as long as needed. Hassle-free -- no regimentation. Treated as intelligent adults."

Bruce Bowker's cozy Carib Inn has no bar and serves no meals, but it has efficiency units, is next door to the Flamingo Hotel and a ten minute walk from downtown restaurants. Bruce knows each site intimately. Allen Myers (Dallas) there last fall says: "Bruce runs an organized, individualized small hotel and rather small-scale dive operation. He has two fast, nice boats. He and another dive master knew everyone's name, were knowledgeable and helpful in planning each dive. I saw a larger variety of marine life in Cayman than I did in Bonaire. Bonaire was much better in every respect than Cozumel. Boats were fast, uncrowded but uncomfortable. Nice swimming pool. The operation is very businesslike and, as a result, lacks some of the warmth one might expect in a small operation. They give good dive briefings and prices are very reasonable. A good pick for serious divers who do not require luxury and for small groups." Judy Willinger and Robert Luke (NYC) keep returning to the Carib because of "easy and beautiful beach diving. Maximum ten on a boat -- you pick the dive site of the day. Many of the rooms are efficiencies, so cooking in can help keep costs down. Lack of large and unusual fish may be unexciting to some, but if relaxed & easy dives observing reef life is what you're after, Bonaire is a great place. NOTE: photographers, please don't use coral heads as anchors for a steady shot!" Peggy Todd Prall (Oakhurst, NJ), reports that rooms are clean, airy, bright. Boats are fast, leave on time and guides will ask what divers want to do. Our group got drift dives, park trip, southern end boat dives -- all we asked for! Visibility is dropping in Bonaire year by year. Too many people? No sewer plant?"

Murder They Wrote...Again

On June 16, in Bonaire, while the Nikonos Shootout was being held, authorities took a 17-year Bonairian into custody for the rape and strangulation murder of 44-year old Frances Oddert Smith of Dallas. The body of Smith was discovered in her room at the Flamingo Beach Hotel at 4 pm. Police arrested the suspect four hours later. The murder had occurred the previous night. The suspect, a body-builder, was a part-time bus boy at the Flamingo.

It's the second rape and murder at the Flamingo Beach in six months.

"Everyone in the Divi Corporation is concerned," Scott Wiggins, vice president of Marketing, told *Undercurrent*. "Our insurance carrier went down and checked out our security and told us it was more than adequate for the size of our operation. But we have increased the security."

Montgomery Hollander, Flamingo manager, told us by phone from Bonaire that "We now have two security people on duty at all times, plus a resident manager on duty at all times. Each is equipped with mobile hand held radios for instant communication. Authorities told us that even if we had had forty-five security people on duty, there was little we could have done to prevent this from happening.

"This kid was a quiet person, very health conscious, who checked out and had relatives working here at the hotel. So we gave him a part-time job as a bus boy.

"I am shocked. Hell, we are all shocked," Hollander said. "There haven't been six major crimes on this island in the past ten years, and now we have two big ones in six months."

Bruce Bowker, who owns the Carib Inn next door to the Flamingo, told us, "To have two murders in six months on this island is unbelievable. Our customers felt it was tragic, but were not overly concerned when they heard about it. No one cancelled a dive."

The Divi Flamingo Beach may be the largest pure divers hotel in the world. A first class photo shop is on the premises. If you like scores of people around doing nothing but talking diving, this is your banana. Not everyone goes for it, so we'll get the criticism out of the way first: Larry J. Wilson, M.D., Louisville, who was there a year ago. "A big disappointment on land after all the hype (including Undercurrent). Rooms far behind expected standard (we should know; we tried three). Restaurant hours and prices leave a lot to be desired. Not one English language newspaper on the island (including none from off the island ... I mean none!). Hotel would never survive in the U.S. A real let-down for my spouse also, who does not dive. Don't come here unless you want to dive every day (and get out of the hotel)." Well, Dr. Wilson, you're right, but for a big diver's hotel, it works well for my money. Noel Taylor & Mike Whitlow, NYC write: "We love this place. The rooms on the ocean are airy, roomy, and kept immaculate [it's worth paying extra for these]. The tone of the resort is casual, friendly and immediately restorative. On three trips the dive boats ran like clockwork, the dive staff were exceptionally helpful and the diving was heavenly -- warm, clear water with very little current, fish galore, including some 5-foot groupers, big turtles, morays, delicate orange seahorses in addition to the angels, parrotfish, Spanish hogfish, spotted drums." Says Peter Woloschiniwsky, Winnipeg, Manitoba: "Probably the best all-around land-based hotel/dive spot in the Caribbean for all types of divers. Some of the nicest healthy corals anywhere (especially around Washington Park), just teeming with macro. Helpful divemasters make diving fun and easy. Shortcomings? A number of times found a rival boat already tied up at a site. Dive Bonaire should think about leaving earlier than 9 a.m. for the choice sites like Rappel, Ebo's, Jerry's Jam, and Karpata. I didn't get to any of these for the above reason. My only other beef would be towards the General Manager. He initially stuck us in the worst room of the hotel (room 515) for, get this ... 'you two aren't married, I know, because I checked your reservations.' After complaining he gave us a quieter and nicer room (303); the next day he treated us very graciously. Stick to hotel management, and not marital status evaluations." Peter Stevenson (Boulder, CO) says, "The hotel and dive operation were well run and efficient. This was my first Peter Hughes experience and I was happy with it. It was a bit 'controlled,' but not overly so, and with several group members just completing their certification, the control was understandable. I was given guidelines but not really monitored." But Valene Rutledge (Miami) says, "Divemasters did not seem to have overall concept of tables. Appeared they had been programmed for 1 hour s.i.t. and did not understand rationale. Photo Bonaire -- Jerry & Suzie excellent as always, available and caring individuals."

And kudos to Flamingo Beach Hotel for what Peter Vernam (Lynn, MA) reports: "Total accessibility for people in wheelchairs (I belong to, and help teach with, the Moray Wheels Adaptive Scuba Association). There were 8 people in wheelchairs in our recent trip with no accessibility problems!" Carl Frascogna (New Milford, NJ) adds, "I was impressed by their commitment to make all of the facilities available to handicapped divers. They very easily handled large groups but sometimes dives are cancelled, changed or crowded to accommodate the larger group."

The Sand Dollar is a spanking new condominium complex with efficiencies to 3 bedroom units, next to the Hotel Bonaire. It's waterside restaurant that cleverly shares quarters with the dive shop. I dived there last year and, oddly, it has the worst beach diving of the hotels, but otherwise is in shipshape. Jim Boruszak (Highland Pk., IL) visited there in December and says, "Outstanding -- a much better value than Flamingo. Better divemasters, better trained and more helpful." Dr. Gilbert Cohen (Hartsdale, NY) says, "The accommodations are excellent, and are much cheaper for a full luxury apartment with 'everything,'

especially for two couples, families or more, than staying at the Flamingo or Bonaire Beach Hotels where you get simple individual hotel rooms.

C.C., travel editor

Why Divers Die, Part II

--Currents, Extra Weights, Even A Shark

This is the second installment of the report and analysis of 1985 sport diving deaths published by the National Underwater Accident Data Center at the University of Rhode Island.

In so many of the cases, the accident and the subsequent death was preventable. We publish this information so that sport divers can learn from the unfortunate yet fatal mistakes made by others.

Medical Aspects of Nonoccupational Diving Fatalities

The NUADC obtained autopsy information on 53 of the 76 sport diver deaths in 1985. Thirty cases were attributable to asphyxiation or drowning. NUADC feels that perhaps 1/3 of these may have actually been barotrauma events, although only 16 were so listed. Several require special comment:

A 49-year-old experienced diver lost his life while diving on a WW II German submarine off Rhode Island. The autopsy found massive gas embolism as the cause, noting that this individual had undergone coronary artery surgery. Such patients are prone to scar tissue which is likely to result in embolism.

An air embolism in a 37-year-old male while diving to 90 feet off the coast of Florida was further complicated by the presence of marijuana, cocaine and alcohol.

"A cardiovascular condition was diagnosed in five of the 1985 fatalities. All of the five victims were males ranging in age from 44 to 55."

A deep lake in Pennsylvania was the site of a death of a 21-year-old male college student who was reportedly undergoing private training in preparation for a deep dive to the Andrea Doria. This victim's buddy had aborted his dive due to a regulator free flow probably caused by freeze-up. The same could likely have been the case for the victim, since his primary air tank was found to be empty, but his emergency pony bottle still had 1000 psi of air.

A cardiovascular condition was diagnosed in five of the 1985 fatalities. All of the five victims were males ranging in age from 44 to 55.

In summary: *Case 1.* A 47-year-old male with extensive diving experience suffered a coronary thrombosis complicated by air embolism while diving in 12 feet of water. *Case 2.* A 55-year-old corporation executive suffered a massive heart attack while diving on vacation in the Caribbean. *Case 3.* A 44-year-old owner of a scuba diving business, who had previously undergone triple by-pass surgery, apparently died of a burst blood vessel. *Case 4.* A 45-year-old male diving in shallow water succumbed to acute myocardial infarct. *Case 5.* A 55-year-old male became entangled in kelp, and was unable to overcome the physical restrictions of arteriosclerotic heart disease.

The above five cases plus several in other years which involve cardiovascular events should indicate to the instructors and instructor agencies the need for a comprehensive physical examination of all applicants for scuba instruction who are over the age of 35.

One case worth noting is that of a U.S. Navy Reserve captain, aged 42 with a brilliant and extensive background in the diving industry. While vacationing in the Caribbean, he became nauseous and vomited while at 60 feet. Upon surfacing, he became unconscious and quadriplegic. The victim was rushed to a decompression chamber within 45 minutes and after initial treatment, was flown to a stateside medical chamber facility. He regained consciousness but not the ability to use his limbs. After six days of intensive treatment, he died of a pulmonary embolism reported to have been the result of extensive immobility.

Starting Causes of Fatalities

The starting cause of some number of cases each year is impossible to determine. Such situations might include such instances in which no witness was present, or in which the body was not recovered. In many instances the local police or sheriff's department has little or no knowledge of diving accidents and therefore failed to do a thorough investigation.

Since 1976, the starting causes of dive fatalities:

- *exhaustion, embolism or panic: 205 deaths
- *air embolism: 123 deaths
- *cave diving: 113 deaths
- *out of air at depth: 60 deaths
- *cardiovascular event: 48 deaths

- *high waves or surf: 37 deaths
- *entangled in kelp or weeds: 26 deaths
- *lost under ice: 22 deaths
- *entangled in external lines: 19 deaths
- *overweighted at depth: 13 deaths
- *hit by a boat: 13 deaths
- *aspiration of vomitus: 11 deaths
- *nitrogen narcosis: 8 deaths
- *intoxication: 7 deaths
- *shark attack: 6 deaths
- *bends: 5 deaths
- *equipment tied on: 4 deaths
- *weight belt entangled: 3 deaths
- *bad air: 3 deaths
- *night dives: 3 deaths
- *lost in wreck: 3 deaths
- *sucked into dam gates: 2 deaths
- *strangled in buddy's dropped weight belt:
1 death
- *broken BC oral inflator: 1 death
- *lost buddy line, black water: 1 death
- *burst tank safety disc, tank flooded: 1 death
- *faulty tank pressure gauge: 1 death
- *regulator freeze up: 1 death
- *on anchor line, struck on head by boat: 1 death
- *tank fell from backpack, strangling diver with
hoses: 1 death
- *choking on a wad of gum: 1 death
- *lost weight belt, rapid ascent: 1 death
- *dry suit inversion: 1 death
- *detached dry suit inflator, 1 death
- *accidental back mounted bouyancy: 1 death
- *foot wedged in rocks: 1 death
- *entangled in flag line: 1 death
- *cramps: 1 death
- *ruptured eardrum: 1 death
- *ruptured stomach blood vessel: 1 death
- *gunshot: 1 death
- *epileptic seizure: 1 death
- *regurgitated food: 1 death
- *suicide: 1 death
- *asthma attack: 1 death
- *struck head on ledge: 1 death
- *brain seizure: 1 death
- *lost at sea: 1 death

Several 1985 cases deserve mention. A 15-year-old boy, who had taken 8 to 10 dives since certification a year previously, was diving with seven other young men. He was missing when the others surfaced. An immediate search found him sitting on the bottom in shallow water with the mouthpiece out and face mask off. He had drowned.

A 42-year-old male vacationing at a Caribbean resort was diving in 35 feet of water with three other persons when he drifted away from the group. The body was found face-down on the bottom with the regulator out of his mouth and the mask missing. This victim was said to have been self-taught and did not receive certification from any agency.

While diving from a private vessel off the coast of Florida, a 23-year-old male succumbed. He had been asked several times whether he was OK and responded that he was. Minutes after the last request, he was sighted on the surface, floating motionlessly. Because of a strong current, it took several minutes to retrieve him. He was pronounced dead by a doctor on board. During CPR this victim regurgitated chunks of food and fluid. He was a certified diver using rented equipment.

"The victim apparently slipped from the stern of the vessel before his scuba gear was ready for operation."

One embolism occurred in 12 feet of water and another in only 8 feet of water. An embolism can occur with as little as a 4-to-6-foot rise in the water. Older persons whose lungs are less elastic are more susceptible to smaller changes.

High waves or surf contributed to the deaths of three California divers. One victim was a 19-year-old male diving at night for lobsters off an Orange County beach. The scenario involved a dramatic rescue attempt by lifeguards who battled 8- to 15-foot waves crashing onto the rocks. The victim's body was found washed ashore a quarter of a mile north of the entrance point the following morning.

Off Monterey, the victim and wife were scuba div-

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ing through rough surf. They were both pushed against the rocks. The victim hit his head and eventually drowned.

The third victim of heavy surf was diving off San Diego County when strong currents and surf knocked him against the rocks repeatedly. He was recovered by lifeguards who administered CPR but were unsuccessful in reviving the victim.

Strong current led to two deaths. A 44-year-old female who was diving with her husband from a charter boat in the Florida Keys. The dive was uneventful until they both surfaced and could not find the original charter boat. They attempted to swim against a strong current to a nearby marker buoy. They both were exhausted when they reached it, and the wife panicked. The buddy-husband was unable to hold her at the surface and she drifted below. A second charter vessel recovered the husband and then dove to a depth of 35 feet where they found the victim sitting on the bottom without the regulator in place and without the mask on her face.

A 31-year-old male was lost and presumed drowned after he fell from a private boat in a ship channel on Long Island, New York. The victim apparently slipped from the stern of the vessel before his scuba gear was ready for operation. A girlfriend dove in and tried to help him, but the current was too strong and she had to let him go.

One case of entanglement in kelp was described by an observer: "The victim was a student diver making a night dive to 60 feet for 35 minutes. After his group of divers surfaced individually and returned to the boat, the victim was missing. The instructor noted a light in the water, and diving to it, found the victim tangled in kelp, regulator out of his mouth, weight belt on, and buoyancy compensator uninflated."

One case in 1985 is a suspected shark attack, occurring on a calm, clear day in August in the Gulf of Mexico off the west coast of Florida. The 67-year-old male victim was in excellent physical shape, had 8 years of diving experience, and the very best of equipment. He disappeared in about 40 feet of water and his body was never found. However, three days later several pieces of his equipment were found on the bottom spread over a small area. One swim fin

and the regulator hose appeared to have been chewed on. The victim's swim suit was found with the right hip section missing, apparently from a large bite.

The one case of external entanglement involved a 34-year-old female student in a training class in a lake in the Midwest. She was found within minutes after her air would have run out entangled in the lines of a surface buoy, only inches below the water surface.

Two cases involved overweighted divers. Both occurred off La Jolla, California. The first victim was a 25-year-old male Navy enlisted man who, with his partner had made a dive to about 80 feet of water and then began to ascend. The buddy partner indicated that he was running out of air and went for the surface. The victim was not seen again until the remains were recovered three months later in 82 feet of water with all equipment intact on the diver. The tank pressure gauge read 0, but was equipped with a J-valve which could not be tripped because of blockage from the high pressure regulator hose. The

NUADC Funded

Each year the National Underwater Accident Data Center struggles to obtain federal funding. This year the struggle ended when the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration granted NUADC \$30,407 toward a \$67,000 projected budget. That grant needs to be matched from private contributions. So far PADI has pledged \$12,500. Last year DEMA contributed \$20,000 and McAniff anticipates a similar contribution this year. Contributions from other sources are needed to make up the \$4,000 difference.

Individual contributions are indeed welcome and will ensure that an analysis of accidents will continue. Send your contributions to:

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Sherwood Regulator Recall

Sherwood has announced a recall of its Magnum II, Oasis and Ultima regulators. They have discovered a faulty part in the first stage, which increases the breathing resistance. The problem was discovered by shops which bench tested the regulators; no accidents have been reported, Fran Skop, Vice President of Marketing, told *Undercurrent*.

Several small washers in the first stage are stacked together to act like a spring. The flex of the washers is insufficient, causing reduced intermediate pressure.

Skop says the biggest problem is with the Ultima. He said that when the washers compress, they block a hole which allows high pressure air to pass and therefore the tank gauge does not give accurate readings. Skop said that either the indicator dropped rapidly on inhalation and jumped rapidly on exhalation or the tank pressure just dropped. It was possible to have 2000 psi in the tank and the gauge read empty.

Dealers have replaced the faulty washers in many of the regulators prior to sale. Sherwood is informing purchasers of the regulator who return warranty cards, asking them to return the faulty models for retrofitting.

The faulty regulators are:

SRB 3300	Magnum II	M106700—M112100
SRB 3400	Oasis	A104950—A109650
SRB 3800	Ultima	all models shipped prior to July 1, 1988

If you own one of these regulators, don't use it. Return it to your Sherwood dealer for retrofitting. For further information, call Sherwood at 716/433-3891.

victim, 6 feet tall and 160 pounds, was found to be carrying 24 pounds of weight, estimated to be six to eight pounds too much for his physical make-up.

A 27-year-old male, 5 foot 8 inches and 159

pounds, was carrying 27 pounds of lead. He got into difficulty in 10 feet of water and despite efforts by a partner to assist him and ensuing rescue efforts by lifeguards, he was pronounced dead on arrival at a hospital. This victim was also reported to have been uncertified and without any formal training.

In Florida, a 45-year-old man with more than a year's experience had donned his weight belt first and then put on the buoyancy compensator vest over the weight belt with all of the straps attached on top of the weight belt. His body was found five days later.

A 51-year-old journalist visting in the Cayman Islands borrowed most of his equipment from a relative before his trip. It was later found that the

Homer, My Apologies

When I printed Homer Fletcher's corrected version of answer to question 8 of the quiz we published in April, I did a rotten job proofing the material before it was printed and typos led to an erroneous answer. I'm embarrassed by the result. This, for the last time, is the correct answer.

When no recompression facility is available, use the following in water procedure to make up omitted decompression in asymptomatic divers for ascents from depths below 20 feet.

Recompress the dive in the water as soon as possible (preferably less than a 5 minute surface interval). Keep the diver at rest, provide a standby diver, and maintain good communication and depth control. Use the following procedure with one minute between stops:

- *Repeat any stops deeper than 40 feet.
- *At 40 feet, remain for one-fourth of the 10 foot stop time.
- *At 30 feet, remain for one-third of the 10 foot stop time.
- *At 20 feet, remain for one half of the 10 foot stop time.
- *At 10 feet, remain for 1-1/2 times the scheduled 10 foot stop time.

Ben Davison
editor-on-the-run

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needle on the submersible pressure gauge did not move off "0" when connected to a full scuba tank, so he could have no idea how much air was left in his tank at any given time. When he was discovered missing by the dive master, an assistant found the victim on the bottom with his mouthpiece out in about 35 feet of water. Extensive efforts at CPR were unsuccessful.

Occupational Fatalities

Fourteen occupational diving fatalities have been recorded in 1985: seven victims were using scuba. Several offer lessons for sport divers.

A 35-year-old male operating in 80 feet of water off the coast of Kona, Hawaii, was collecting tropical fish. The victim became separated from his diving buddy and upon recovery was found to have suffered a major air embolism.

While diving from a commercial treasure salvage vessel, a 32-year-old male died off the Keys in Florida. It was reported that he had entered the water to move an anchor when his tank suddenly shifted on

his back, causing him to panic. A rescue ensued, and the diver spent six days in the hospital before succumbing.

A New Jersey golf course was the site of the death of a 38-year-old male who was retrieving golf balls from a lake. He reportedly breathed his tank to "0" and expired in 10 feet of water and only 15 feet from shore. There was no explanation as to why he had been unable to surface or reach shore except, perhaps, overweighted with the golf balls.

A U.S. Navy diver died after 10 hours in a decompression chamber for treatment of air embolism. This man had been part of a two-man dive team recovering dummy mines in Chesapeake Bay.

A 30-year-old firefighter/rescue squad member lost his lift while attempting to rescue a victim in an overturned van in a Florida canal. In this accident the would-be rescuer had made his attempt using only mask and snorkel.

Conclusion: In a subsequent issue, Undercurrent will analyze and comment about these accidents and deaths.

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_____ JUNE 1987: Martinique, French West Indies; Deciding To Go Deep; Battery Explosion; Laboratory Tests of Seasickness Remedies.

_____ JULY 1987: Florida Keys, U.S.A.; A Guaranteed Swim With The Dolphins; Whither The Purge Valve Mask? Taking The Risk of Decompression Sickness.

_____ AUGUST 1987: Papua, New Guinea; Stress, Anxiety and Diver Performance; Cutting Photography Costs; Technisub Fin Problem.

_____ SEPTEMBER 1987: Uepi, Anuha, Guadalcanal; Solomon Islands; The Bursting of High and Low Pressure Hoses; Diver Malaria Warning.

_____ OCTOBER 1987: Sea Dancer, Turks and Caicos,

_____ B.W.I.: Preventing Post-Dive Hypothermia; Potential Neurological Risks To Sport Divers.

_____ NOV/DEC 1987: U.S. Navy 1987 Tests of 51 Regulators; Unmanned Open Water Testing; Unmanned Cold Water Testing; Undercurrent Comments

_____ JANUARY 1988: The Nikonos Technique Seminar, Bonaire, *et al*; Two Dangerous Dry Suit Valves; Just How Many Active Divers Are There?

_____ FEBRUARY 1988: Tax Deductible Diving For Science; The Risks of Sport Diving; Why Some Operators Violate Coast Guard Regulations.

_____ MARCH 1988: The Great Barrier Reef, Australia; The Challenges of Cave Diving; Is The CO₂ Cartidge Essential To Safety?

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