



# Lusitania REVISITED

by Gary Gentile  
photography by  
Simon and Polly Tapson

During the first two weeks of June 1994, approximately 120 dives were conducted on the Lusitania, among the most famous in maritime history. The expedition team, which consisted of 8 British divers, was led by Polly Tapson, a British woman who has been diving since 1986. Here is an insider's look

# ania TED



90-year-old British wreck, which ranks  
and four Americans, was organized  
adventure.

I was wrong.

In my 1989 foreword to *Andrea Doria: Dive to an Era*, I wrote, "People asked to name some famous shipwrecks invariably rattle off the big three: the *Titanic*, the *Lusitania*, and the *Andrea Doria*."

The *Lusitania*, at a depth of 320 feet [98 meters], has been dived by commercial divers wearing cumbersome and expensive oil rig apparatus, breathing a mixture of helium and oxygen, and tethered to a surface support vessel by means of umbilical hoses. Only a few divers in the world are qualified to operate at this depth."

Five years later, as I made the descent into the dark waters off the coast of Ireland where the old passenger liner lies, I realized that my prognosis about diving the *Lusitania* would now be in dire need of update.

At the time my book was published, I had no reason to believe that the *Lusitania* might be attainable by non-commercial methods. Somewhat unexpectedly, one of the most tragic wartime shipwrecks was now accessible to free-swimming scuba divers, just five short years later, and I was one of the first participants in the exploration of her sunken remains.

When I wrote the book, individual divers had attained and even exceeded the depth at which the *Lusitania* lay, but they did not leave their vertical descent line. Their purpose was to break existing scuba depth records; they did not accomplish useful work or make any observations. Similarly, the use of mixed gas scuba was also gaining converts among the underground; a select group of expert cave divers had begun to make lengthy mixed gas penetrations into Florida's seemingly bottomless sink holes and fresh water caves.

As a result, it was probably inevitable that self-contained mixed gas diving would expand its horizons

into the highly variable, uncontrolled, and unforgiving open ocean environment. Driven by the thrill of discovery, the spirit of adventure, and that most unquantifiable of human traits, personal challenge, shipwreck exploration has

continued to push to deeper depths. Indeed, so rapid has been the progress of high-tech or technical scuba diving that it may justifiably be called an advent rather than an advance, a revolution rather than an evolution.

In the overall scheme of this new era of deep wreck exploration, the 1994 *Lusitania* project was but a harbinger of greater things to come—a stepping stone to our eventual conquest of the deep blue sea. What once was accessible only by expensive commercial means, was now being conducted on scuba. Multiple tank configurations and emerging operational techniques allowed our team to achieve what previously had been considered impossible.

No expedition can be expected to function smoothly unless adequate preparations have been made far in advance. Expedition organizer Polly Tapson was primarily responsible for site analysis, boat charter arrangements, transportation logistics including on site delivery of gas cylinders, compressors and boosters, as well as hotel accommodations.

Our home base for the duration was Kinsale, a sleepy tourist town on the south coast of Ireland. A lighthouse a few miles away, known as Old Head of Kinsale, sits 11.5 miles from the *Lusitania*'s resting place on the ocean floor. The village is remote, a 45 minute drive from from the nearest city Cobh, known as Queenstown at the time of the *Lusitania*'s sinking.

Kinsale is less than ideal for the headquarters of an equipment intensive expedition. Everything the team needed or anticipated needing had to be trucked in ahead of time or



## hope in haskel land...



brought along. No dive gear, or kit, as the British say, can be rented or purchased locally. Gas cylinders, compressors, and boosters had to be transported to the site. The Kinsale Folk House, a cozy hotel where we lodged, does maintain a tank filling station. Located on a narrow lane in a neighborhood of row houses, the Folk House caters to dive tourism.

For the U.S. members of the team, all tanks, stage bottles, dry-suits, and other paraphernalia had to be air-freighted weeks in advance, then shipped back at the expedition's end. Thoroughly violating the airline's weight limit, we brought regulators, cameras, and other essentials on the plane as baggage or carry-on luggage.

Dive preparations were unending. Each team member had an assigned duty, but being on the team also meant pitching in where and when needed. Slack time was non-existent.

Each day began with reveille — a 6:30 a.m. phone call in each person's room. Two members of the twelve person team were assigned each day as dive marshalls, a rotating duty. The marshalls did everything from making the wake-up calls to keeping everyone on schedule to overseeing the dive to erecting the decompression station in the water. They did not get to dive the wreck that day.

Since the restaurant at the Folk House did not open until 8 a.m., breakfast consisted of buns and cold cereal unless the owner could be convinced to have the cook come in early to prepare eggs, sausage, and French toast. Diver Christina Campbell served as liaison with the hotel and arranged for a boxed lunches.

The first task after breakfast was to analyze the gas in our tanks. We began the expedition with thirty-two storage bottles of pre-blended trimix 13/52 (13% O<sub>2</sub>, 52% He, balance N<sub>2</sub>). By the second week our initial supply was gone. The delivery of pure helium allowed us to custom blend trimix, which required more time than simple cascading and topping off. Each person analyzed his own gases, both bottom mix and nitrox which was used for decompression. Some people filled their tanks to 6/7 their rated pressure, then topped off with air, leaving a final blend of trimix 14/45. This choice cut about fifteen minutes off the decompression at the expense of a deeper equivalent narcotic depth.

Blending on site unavoidably leads to slight variations in the final mix. Nitrox blends sometimes were off just enough to exceed the allowable tolerance for oxygen toxicity units according to the planned decompression schedule, or to affect the off-gassing curve adversely. When this situation occurred, Dave Wilkins quickly cut a new schedule on his laptop and printed it for the person in need. This procedure was quicker and easier than blending a new bottle of nitrox since boat loading began promptly at 8 o'clock.

By 7:30 each morning, the dive marshalls were already swinging their paddles. We loaded gear in the van. Called a lorry by the British, the vehicle was loaned to us by Peugeot for the expedition. Ten sets of doubles, twenty stage bottles, ten oxygen bottles, all personal kit and drysuit underwear filled the cargo area. Team member Paul Owen supervised the loading and drove the van to the dock. The rest of the team walked a pleasant half mile along the narrow, empty streets through the picturesque town. There is no rush hour traffic in Kinsale; in fact there is no rush of any kind.

Two boats were chartered to take us out to the dive site each day. The 42-foot *Sundancer II*, owned and operated by Nic Grotto, was our primary support vessel. The *Tornado*, a rigid inflatable boat owned and operated by Howard Weston, augmented it, hauling the decompression station, called a dec station (see "Decompressing On Starfish

## starfish enter- prise docked



Enterprise" pg 30), and doubling as a chase boat. At the marina, we would first lay out all gear on a sloping cobblestone ramp. Its treacherous lower end was overgrown with slick seaweed, a hazard that knocked more than one person on his bum.

Tanks and personal kit were loaded onto the *Sundancer II* in precise order so that equipment for the pair who entered the water first was closest to the aft dressing station, and so on in sequence. Tanks were rigged before leaving the dock to allow repairs and part replacement for regulators, hoses, pressure gauges and BCDs that showed any sign of trouble. Then we lashed stage bottles to the rail next to our doubles, stowed backup gear, drysuit underwear, cameras and emergency oxygen bottles below.

The dec station was partially pre-assembled and stowed in plastic buckets, then placed aboard the *Tornado* by Richard Tulley. Each set of divers assembled the portion they would need, consisting of a large orange buoy, forty feet of rope and five pounds of lead weight. D-rings were affixed to the line at 6 meters/20 feet. Two oxygen bottles, regulators and pressure gauges would be clipped to these. A six-foot length of PVC pipe served as a spacing bar located at the attachment point to the adjacent module. Once we reached the dive site, a dive marshal would enter the water to complete the assembly of the decompression station.

The hour and a half ride to the wreck site provided quiet time to contemplate the 300-foot/92 m dive ahead, an event not to be

taken lightly. Then Captain Nic would call, "Twenty minutes," signalling our imminent approach to our destination. At his call, the first two divers would jam into the cabin to begin kitting up as the U.K. divers called it. Donning nappies (diapers) and drysuits, the pair would transition to a spray swept afterdeck, making room in the cabin for the next two dressers. The dive marshal assigned to set up the dec station also suited up, and thus was ready to render in-water assistance if needed.

Irish coastal waters are tidal. The flow of water is generally too strong for diving other than at slack time, when the tide turns. Each day's departure was timed to put the team at the Lusitania at an ideal moment determined by the slack. Missing it meant losing the day's diving, so timing was essential as was each diver's readiness to hit the water as soon as the flow stopped. In forty-five minutes, the tide would run again, making diving again difficult at best, and nearly impossible with the burden of double tanks and two stage bottles.

The tide follows the phases of the moon, so the slack slipped by fifty minutes each day. By the end of the week, our dives shifted to the afternoon, at which point we jumped back a tide to catch the new morning slack. In the meantime, the shifting time meant doing jobs like filling the tanks late in the day. On some days, the chores could not be finished before bed time, leaving work for the morning.

At the Lusitania, the *Sundancer* did not drop anchor. Instead, a shot line attached to a buoy was placed in the water to help the divers descend and return.

When the first pair was ready, the Captain maneuvered the boat into position near the buoy. They rolled overboard and swam through still water as the next pair hustled into position on board. Our dive marshalls adjusted stage bottles, lights, and aided in getting the team efficiently into the water. All divers carried line reels and emergency sausages in case of surfacing away from the buoy or going adrift.

The shot line was nearly vertical when the tide was not running. Getting down to the seabed took four minutes flat, including the time needed to check in on the name slate at 60f/18m. ▶ 34

## tapson's turn



# History

## Lusitania



by Gary Gentile

The *Lusitania*, an immense and luxurious passenger liner sunk by a torpedo fired from a German submarine during World War I, had a colorful history before and after her tragic demise on May 7, 1915.

When constructed in 1907, the ship was the largest and fastest passenger liner ever launched. At 785 feet, she was 80 feet longer than her nearest competitor, the Kaiser Wilhelm II. An 88-foot-beam ensured lateral stability, broad decks and spacious public rooms. Her draft of 33 feet required that docking facilities be dredged to clearance depths. Her gross tonnage was 32,500 (compared to 20,000 gross tons for the Kaiser Wilhelm II). Four steam turbines, generating 68,000 horsepower, drove four manganese bronze propellers. Twenty-five coal-fired boilers provided steam for the turbines.

The *Lusitania* was appointed sumptuously and finished in rich woods and ornate decorations. The dining saloon was a two-deck affair topped by a domed ceiling of glass; 500 people could be seated in Edwardian era splendor. The smoking room, writing room, library, and lounge were commodious, each paneled with its own motif of carved moldings and pilasters, embroidered valances, silk curtains, leather upholstered chairs, mahogany furniture, inlaid tables, and deep pile carpeting. The high ceilings and arched domes added an ambiance of open-air spaciousness.

The *Lusitania* wasted no time winning the coveted Blue Riband for the fastest transatlantic crossing. (Crossing the Atlantic in 7 days—ed.) The speed record was broken by her sister ship, the **Mauretania**, after she entered service the following year, but the “Lusey,” as the *Lusitania* was more familiarly known, quickly regained the trophy with a speed of 25 knots.

During the next eight years the “Lusey” made one hundred round-trip voyages between New York and her home port, Liverpool. Despite the outbreak of war in Europe, in 1914, the “Lucy” maintained service between the continents.

On May 1, 1915, the day the *Lusitania* was scheduled to leave the U.S. for England, the Imperial German Embassy published a prophetic notice in New York newspapers: “Travellers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the water adjacent to the British Isles; that in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or of

any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters; and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.”

On May 7, 1915, as the *Lusitania* approached the Old Head of Kinsale on the south coast of Ireland, the German submarine U-20 steered a parallel but opposite course. The previous day, the sub had torpedoed and sunk two Allied vessels in the Irish Channel.

Captain William Turner, in command of the *Lusey*, had been warned by radio that U-boats were operating in the area. Told to steer a zigzag course clear of headlands, he chose not to do so: it was not just luck that he crossed the periscope sights of Kapitänleutnant Walther Schwieger. A single torpedo fired by Schwieger hit the *Lusitania* on the starboard side abaft the forward funnel. A secondary explosion followed a moment later, causing Schwieger to write in his war diary “boiler or coal or powder?”

That question is still hotly debated and a con-



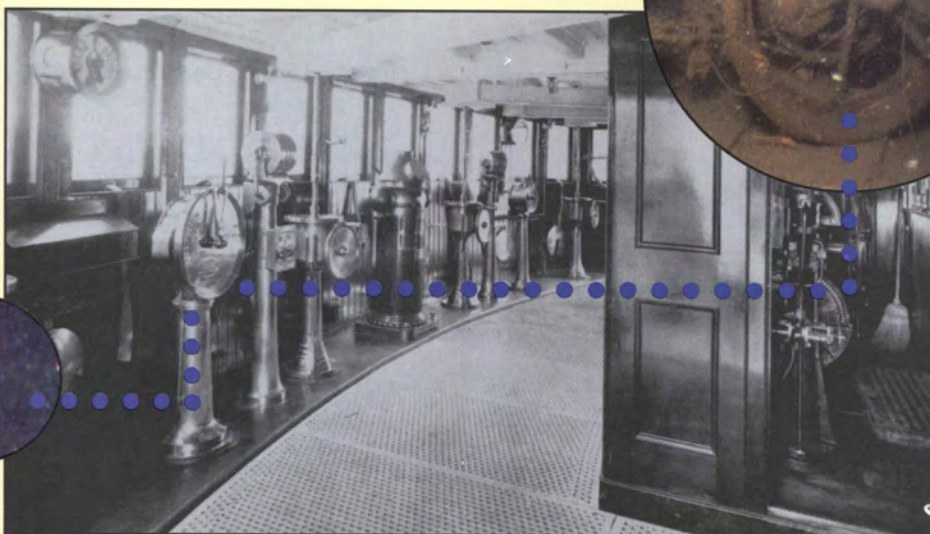
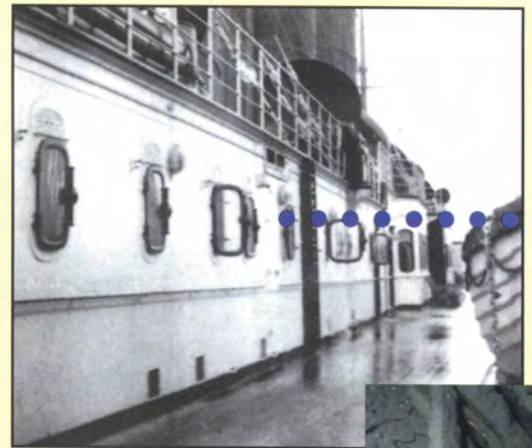
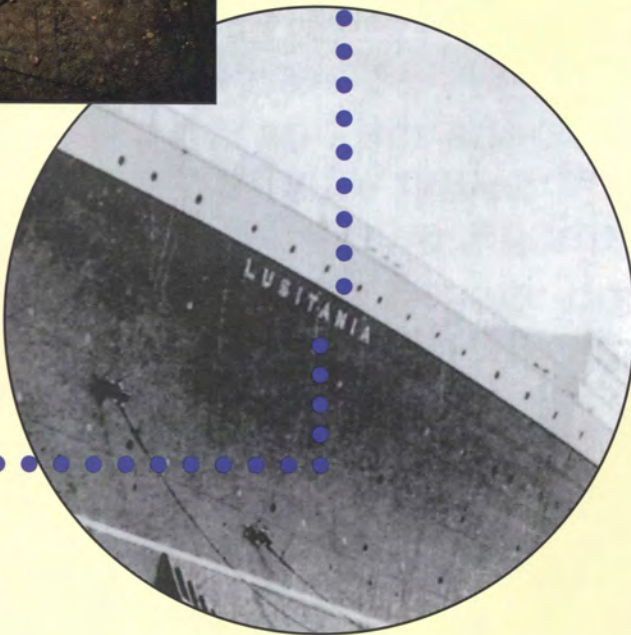
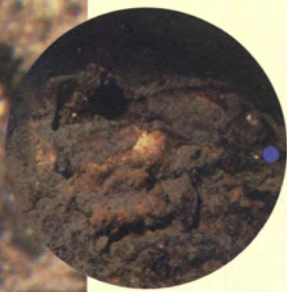
trovery among historians to this very day. Captain Turner turned his vessel toward shore, but the *Lusitania* sank in less than twenty minutes a little more than eleven miles from the rocky coast. The captain never gave the order

to abandon ship, and consequently, by the time his subordinate officers took it upon themselves to launch lifeboats, it was too late. Of the 1,959 passengers and crew aboard, 1,198 lost their lives either by drowning or hypothermia. Among the dead were 128 Americans.

Many people today falsely believe that the sinking of the *Lusitania* was the cause for the U.S. entry into the war. The tragedy was not the final outrage since the U.S. did not declare war on Germany until nearly two years later, on April 6, 1917.

People continue to argue over whether there was ammunition aboard, even though the British Admiralty freely acknowledges that a consignment of cannon shells was on the cargo manifest. The more important debate is whether the gun powder caused the secondary explosion. Since the magazine was in a bow compartment forward of the wheel house, and the second explosion occurred about amidships, this seems unlikely.

Probably it was as Schwieger and others surmised at the time: a coal dust explosion in the empty bunkers ignited by the flames of the torpedo blast.



text and photography by  
Gary Gentile  
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Ken Marshall



**sir-d-o2**



**how tully stays dry**

Each diver could remain on the bottom between fifteen and twenty-five minutes depending upon individual preference and surface conditions. Some of the dives were in five to six foot seas with a short chop, making an uncomfortable hang. Decompression times averaged ninety to one hundred minutes, putting the total time in the water at about two hours. That plus 47f/8c water made nappies mandatory. Argon gas for suit inflation was definitely a creature comfort, but not a necessity.

Reaching the *Lusitania* is worth the extreme effort to get there. The wreck is the most exciting I've ever seen in 25 years of diving. Portholes by the dozen and windows by the score decorate the hull and lie loose in the debris field. More wheelhouse equipment is accessible than I have encountered on half a dozen virgin wrecks. The stern docking telegraph lies on the seabed amid a field of clutter. The main navigating bridge has collapsed and rusted away, leaving behind such items of bronze as two telemotors, two telegraphs, and an annunciator.

Rarities in the untouched state are a treat that few wreck divers can hope to see. The *Lusitania* is not just a dive, it is a seductive experience.

Ambient light on the wreck was near zero, due to a thick layer of plankton that absorbs all sunlight. With a light, visibility reached eight to 25f/2-8m. Swimming at 300ft/92 m below sea level in body-length visibility is a frightening, perhaps even terrifying, experience.

At the bottom of the shot line, flashing strobes signalled the way home, and some team members used line reels to retrace their paths. Despite the safety precautions we took, visiting the *Lusitania* was scary.

Our deepest depth was 310f/95m, just short of the 320 f/98 m depth attained by Oceaneering divers when they salvaged the *Lusitania's* propellers in 1982. Extreme ▶ 34

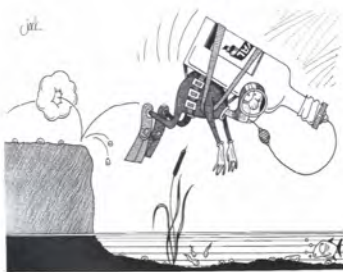
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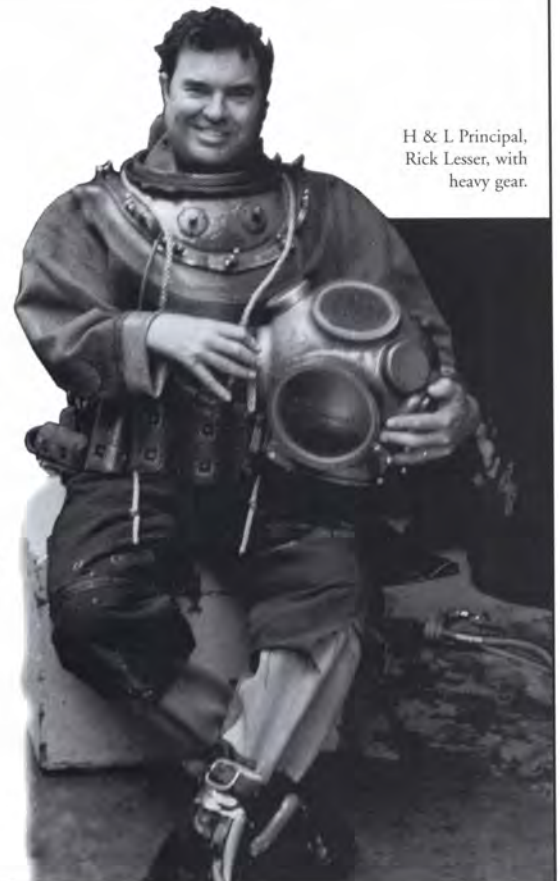
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The

# TEAM

## The British members were:



**Polly Tapson**, 31, a British film producer who has been diving since 1986.



**Simon Tapson**, 34, was assigned to Haskels and first aid duty for Lus '94. The husband of Polly, he has been diving since 1986 and works as a head hunter. In 1995, he will lead the Aboukir, Hogue & Cressy trip to Holland.



**Richard Tully**, 29, is a research assistant at Brunel University, specializing in microelectronics. He has been diving since 1986. Tully worked the decompression station during the *Lusitania* expedition.



**Jamie Power**, 24, was the youngest member of the team. He works for British Airways customer service and has been diving since 1983. His duty was boat organization.



**Christina Campbell**, 30, has been diving since 1983. She began diving in Scotland, doing archeology on sunken bronze age buildings. Campbell works as a head hunter and was responsible for taking care of the *Lusitania* team's lodging requirements.



**Nick Hope**, 28, is a product design engineer who has been diving since 1986. He was tasked to Haskels for the expedition.



**Dave Wilkins**, 44, is an engineer and freelance programmer who has been diving since 1970. His job on the team was in water oxygen.



**Paul Owen**, 38, is a dive inspector with the West Midlands Police Force. Owen has been diving since 1982 and is partial to shark diving when no wreck is available.

## The four American divers were:



**John Yurga**, 30, is a shipwreck researcher and manager of East Coast Diving, Staten Island. A diver since 1987, he was assigned to nitrox duty for the *Lusitania* dives.



**Gary Gentile**, 49, says he's been diving since time began. He is an author and photographer specializing in wreck diving, with extensive experience diving the *Andria Doria* wreck. Gentile was assigned site analysis duty for the *Lusitania*.



**Barb Lander**, 37, has been diving since 1988. She is a nitrox instructor and "professional dive vagabond." Lander led the 1994 Monitor survey expedition. For the *Lusitania* dives, she was assigned record keeping duties.



**John Chatterton**, 42, is a commercial and technical diver who began diving in 1961. Chatterton also had nitrox duty.

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<b>WRECK:</b>	Dutch Schooner "Araby Maid" built in 1868
<b>DEPTH:</b>	215 FSW
<b>YEAR SUNK:</b>	1901
<b>LOCATION:</b>	100 miles west of Key West, Florida
<b>MISSION:</b>	First Ever to Explore, Document, and Excavate
<b>CONDITION:</b>	Fully Intact
<b>WHEN:</b>	June 1995



Leading our deep diving team will be Capt. Billy Deans and his crew. As well as being the foremost authority in his field of deep diver training, Billy has been involved in numerous wreck expeditions. Among them are the Civil war wreck *Monitor* (220 FSW), the salvage of art work from the *Andrea Doria* (250 FSW), and the Spanish treasure wreck *El Cazador* (310 FSW).



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# Hang on Starfish Enterprise

By Polly Tapson



The numerous challenges faced by the *Lusitania* '94 expedition included finding a safe, reliable method for 12 divers to decompress simultaneously on a precise timetable. The conditions were dictated in part by a strong, shifting tidal current.

After experimenting with several variations on a theme that included buoys, lines and plastic plumber's piping, we settled on an elaborate homemade structure dubbed the "Starfish Enterprise" decompression station. Starfish Enterprise is our unofficial name for the two-year effort to dive the *Lusitania*.

U.K. dive boats rarely anchor into a wreck site or make permanent moorings, due to a

combination of fierce tidal streams and a choice among thousands of wrecks on England's South West coast. Standard operating procedure for wreck dive charters here is entirely different to that used in the United States.

The system we used was modular, and resembles a three-dimensional spider-web in the water. The pieces could be assembled in advance, then stowed in plastic buckets in an inflatable support vessel for quick deployment in the water with the aid of two support divers at the surface. Correct storage was critical to achieving smooth deployment instead of a tangle of knots that would challenge even King Arthur's sword.

tidal variations and a spring tide at certain times can make quite a sizeable difference. The average difference between consecutive high and low tides is ten feet, but the sun's alignment can make the difference greater.

The deeper stages of decompression, conducted on the shot line, began at 150f/46m. When the last diver in the water ascended to the slate, he would look for a check mark indicating the rest of the team had returned. By then, the tide had turned, and divers on the dec station were hanging on hard and waiting for the last diver to arrive. Unclipping the carabineer from the shot line, the last diver up liberated the breakaway line and dec station. Everything and everybody went adrift.

Ten decompressing divers then would drift along with the five-station dec system designed by Polly Tapson. Once detached from the shot line, the segments had a tendency to bunch up like the alternating sides of a rattlesnake, thrusting the divers into each other. The up-and-down motion of the waves added to the action to produce tank banging and sore heads for a few moments, until the in-water dive marshal stabilized the station by joining its ends, and adding one more

length of PVC pipe to keep as a spreader. The result was a 5-sided geometrical figure that resembled a home plate, with a pair of divers at each angle. Long low-pressure hoses allowed us to spread out to either side of our oxygen bottles with elbow room to spare. The in-water dive marshal flitted about like a mother hen, constantly asking if the divers were okay and had sufficient oxygen. After the stress of getting ready and then diving, the drift decompression was the most relaxing part of the day.

When the boats reached the dock, the real drudgery began. First, we unloaded and stowed the tanks in the van. Personal kit needed rinsing and underwear needed drying. At the Folk House, more tank totting preceded another nightly round of duty reloading gases.

Simon Tapson and Nick Hope were fettered to the booster station, dubbed Haskel land (Haskel Inc. manufacturers a leading booster pump—ed.). They rarely left the spot until dinner, devoting countless hours to boosting the helium for bottom mix and oxygen for nitrox. John Chatterton and John Yurga were caged in the compressor room topping off more than forty cylinders with air, analyzing oxygen and transferring argon. The two often were still pumping at 11 p.m.

Here's how Starfish Enterprises' dec station works:

1. The wreck is shot using a 56 lb. weight and upline with a swell breaker that dampens sea state oscillations.
2. Two divers set the hook and then release a float, indicating the task is complete and that the dec station can be assembled.
3. The second pair of divers clips a 26 meter/85 f length of rope, called the lazy shot, to a loop in the upline at 24 meters/78 f. A large slate is attached here where divers can sign in, or out by removing tape next to their names or moving clothes pegs. A small buoy and connection ring is spliced into the other end of the rope to float at the surface.
4. A support diver then enters the water to receive the first module of the system from the support vessel. The diver attaches it to the lazy shot at 6 meters/20 f. The dec station has six modules, each equipped with tanks and equipment needed by two divers for decompression.
5. The second module is passed to the support diver. The diver attaches a fiberglass pole to the next downline at six meters. The process is repeated until the dec station modules are all deployed.

6. The support diver untapes drop lines and releases them. Tape has held the lines together for better manageability. The diver checks to see that the bottles are aligned at 6 meters, the bottles are off, the regulators are positively pressurized, no equipment has failed.

After the dive, divers ascend to the 24 meter/78 f mark, sign out and traverse via the lazy shot to their spot on the dec station. Each pair has prepared their station before departing land. Their container of decompression equipment is positioned to correspond to their entry position into the water.

Stowage and deployment is coordinated so that dive pair one returns to dec station one, pair two to dec station two, and so on. From 24 meters/78 f, the divers ascend via their own line, avoiding the Jacuzzi effect created by other divers below.

The last diver out releases the entire dec station to drift in the tidal currents while both boats stand by at the surface.

The in-water support diver remains with the divers, clipping the ends of the dec station together to form what we referred to as the pentangle of doom. He or she carries two high pressure O2 pony bottles as an immediate back up for any diver experiencing problems with their O2 rig or as an interim measure if their gas supply is low. Full cylinders are in the support boat if needed.

Rigged dec station modules are ready in case a diver makes an open water ascent and misses the dec station. If it happens, the diver sends up a marker buoy. The second support diver, who is dry and on the boat, drops a spare module down to the diver adrift.

One boat stands by the drifting diver, and the other stays with the main dec station and larger group of divers, maintaining radio contact.



Dave Wilkins stripped the used oxygen bottles of hose clamps and D-rings, and rigged ten unused bottles. Richard Tulley stretched out the ropes and PVC pipes making up the dec station. Once hauled out of the water and dumped in a heap on the Tornado, the system became a mass of knots needing untangling.

Jack-of-all-trades Jamie Powell did repairs and made drawings of the wreckage and debris field. Barb Lander collected dive profiles and decompression schedules for the expedition log, then pitched in on odd jobs.

My responsibility was working with the ship's plans: ascertaining where we were on the wreck, keeping a written record of what we saw and interesting places to go — none of which helped the expedition's more immediate needs. I got most of my post-dive exercise by humping tanks back and forth to Haskel land, a distance of a couple hundred feet through the hotel courtyard and along the sidewalk. Next time I'm opting for a more intellectual skill.

Between eight and ten, a languorous dinner provided relief from the day's never-ending tasks. A debriefing session gave each diver an opportunity to talk and make suggestions for greater safety and effi-

ciency. Then came excellent Irish cuisine, followed by a soft pillow to cuddle for a few short hours before the 6:30 wake up call began the whole process over again.

Why did we choose to risk the unknown depths with seat-of-the-pants equipment? Why not wait for the technology such as rebreathers or hard suits to become practical? Christopher Columbus did not sit at the dock waiting for transatlantic liners to be built. The Wright brothers did not lie on the dunes hoping for jet engines to be invented. We did with what we had. In the process, the 1994 *Lusitania* expedition paved the way for tomorrow's ventures.

*Gary Gentile is an author, photographer, lecturer and deep sea wreck diver with over 23 titles to his credit; ten science fiction novels, and ten nonfiction works including "Andrea Doria: Dive to an Era", a wreck he is intimately familiar with having conducted more than 100 Doria dives.*

*Gentile began his diving career in 1970 and has been instrumental in the development of modern self-contained deep wreck diving. A long standing contributor to aquaCORPS, Gentile can be contacted @ f:215.722.3017, Philadelphia, PA.*

Thinking of diving the *Lusitania*?

You may have to pay Greg Bemis, a New Mexico-based venture capitalist who claims to own the wreck, for the pleasure. At our deadline, he was awaiting a Virginia court decision on his claim to the ship. Whether it sides with him or dismisses the case, Bemis plans to continue trying to charge divers to visit the *Lusitania*.

A three-way tug of war over the ocean liner's ownership erupted as Polly Tapson was assembling her expedition last year.

Bemis, who says he acquired rights to the *Lusitania* in the late 1960s, demanded that she and her team pay him an unspecified fee, and sign a paper that would give him ownership of photos or writing resulting from the visit. Tapson took a careful look at the situation, decided that Bemis could not clearly prove himself to be the true owner of the wreck, and decided to ignore him.

A steady stream of letters from lawyers and threats ensued.

Six months after the expedition, Bemis still had not given up his attempt to exact pay-

## Who Owns the Lusey?

ment. Late last year, he was in the process of making claim against the four U.S. members of Tapson's team for \$60,000 each in property damages, saying that they had committed piracy.

Even if Bemis succeeds in getting a court to agree that he's the owner, Tapson believes that she and other divers did not violate his property right. Besides her argument that Bemis cannot prove that he owns the Lucy, Tapson says that her team did not dive "on" the ship, just near it.

However, the American divers with her brought back souvenirs — deck prisms, a porthole and a soapdish, according to one of their attorneys, Peter Hess. That revelation in court in December preceded the judge's decision to throw out a counterclaim to the *Lusitania* by the American divers, Hess said.

Besides Bemis, two other parties claim the 90 year old wreck. Muriel Light, the widow of a man who devoted his life to studying the *Lusitania*, says that her late husband still owned the rights at the time of his death in 1992. A third claim was asserted in September by four American divers affiliated with Tapson's expedition. They formed a company called Fifty Fathom Ventures to challenge Bemis.

Bemis says he acquired the Lusey from John Light in the 1960s as part of a financial deal among the two and a third man. Light purchased the rights from the War Risk office in 1967 to the hull and machinery lying on the ocean floor for 1,000 British pounds.

Tapson says Bemis is unable to produce documents that prove his claim, and Mrs. Light says her husband never turned over his

ownership of the wreck to the venture capitalist.

Bemis says an English court decision in the 1980s confirms his ownership. That ruling stemmed from a fight over possessory rights to items salvaged from the ship by him and Oceaneering International.

But Tapson says the English decision focused on who owned the salvaged items only, not the wreck itself. As far as she can determine, the ownership of the *Lusitania* has passed from the Cunard line before the sinking to three rightful owners afterwards, based on wartime insurance practices. Light never got more than the hull and machinery in his original purchase, since the cargo and passenger possessions were excluded, and thus, if Tapson is right, Bemis' claim to own the wreck is suspect.

Two earlier groups who sent expeditions to the *Lusitania* have recognized him as the owner and paid Bemis for visiting the wreck.

But Tapson, Fifty Fathom Ventures and Light's widow say Bemis' claim is fraudulent. They had hoped to be vindicated in the current legal contest, clearing the way for future diving to the Lusey.

The fight moved to a Norfolk, Va. courtroom in February 1994 when Bemis dragged his claim into a U.S. District Court.

While Bemis initiated actions to get the U.S. court to confirm that he owned the *Lusitania*, he simultaneously tried to dissuade the Tapson group from diving. In the process, he alleged that Tapson's diving could constitute criminal conduct and international piracy. The American divers on the team countercharge that shadowy "agents" hired by Bemis tried to sabotage the expedition by tampering with their boats.

Gary Gentile, one of the American divers, says a support boat in Ireland went "up in flames" and had its engine's electrical wiring burned. On Dec. 5, the day Gentile was supposed to leave to testify in the Virginia court case, a fire bomb was set off in his driveway, an incident he says is "a curious coincidence."

The trouble between the divers and Bemis started well before the diving began. On June 2, Bemis' attorney sent a letter to Tapson, citing the Merchant and Shipping Act as the law her dive might break. Tapson says Irish law allows for diving without a license in the vicinity of wrecks less than 100 years old. Bemis' lawyer's interpretation was that persons boarding or attempting to board a wrecked or stranded vessel without the owner's permission is guilty of an offense.

If she proceeded with her dives, Tapson could be fined and imprisoned, and have her equipment and vessels confiscated, the letter said. Bemis had hired an Irish attorney in Cort and promised to take Tapson to court in Ireland, England, the United States or elsewhere. As of December, he had not done so.

When the four American divers learned of the U.S. case after the diving, they decided to make a counterclaim. After all, since they'd used the latest technology to successfully visit the *Lusitania*, a sympathetic judge might rule that their work gave them a stronger claim to the wreck than the financier's.

In September, Fifty Fathom Ventures filed a motion in the Virginia court arguing that the U.S. court had no jurisdiction over a wreck in the Celtic Sea. Jurisdiction is another area of controversy.

The wreck lies just inside Irish waters, which extend 13 miles offshore, meaning that Irish law should apply. But in the mid-1980s during the Oceaneering case, the English court had jurisdiction. At that time, the *Lusitania* was in international waters, with Irish territorial waters extending only three miles out. In 1988, Ireland extended its jurisdiction out beyond the *Lusitania*, giving Irish courts jurisdiction.

The American divers made a second point in their September fil-

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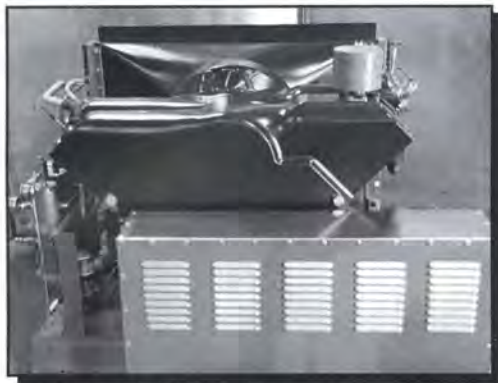
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ing: Bemis has abandoned the wreck by failing to use the latest technology to dive on it. Fifty Fathom Ventures claimed it had salvors rights because it is the only group to safely dive on the wreck since 1982.

Four Irish divers visited the wreck in August, after the Tapson expedition. The four signed documents agreeing that artifacts or intellectual property from the dive would belong to Beamis, but did not consider themselves to be diving for the venture capitalist, sources said. However, their dives resulted in severe injury to one member of the team.

In late December, the judge dismissed Fifty Fathom Venture's claim. Hess said the disclosure that the divers took artifacts undermined their credibility in court and allowed them to be portrayed as "wreck looters."

Bemis says "They were not, as the judge put it, operating with clean hands." In late December, he awaited a decision on his claim, hoping to establish his control over diving the *Lusitania* in the U.S. legal system. "I'm a U.S. citizen. It is my property and there is ample evidence that a U.S. judge has jurisdiction and the right to help a U.S. citizen," Bemis told aquaCorps.

Exactly what remains to be salvaged

and its value is unclear. Hess says "a lot of valuable artifacts" remain on the huge passenger liner, although its 90 foot beam has crumbled to 30 feet. Tapson says valuable old paintings are believed to be among the wreckage, and many other possessions of the passengers probably could be recovered.

Bemis says he's considered assembling a travelling museum of *Lusitania* artifacts. He also says he plans to charge future diving expeditions a tour fee, but that it is negotiable.

"I'm interested in dives that result in preserving and researching the wreck, rather than looting it," he told aquaCorps.

Mrs. Light says she is worried that Bemis or other salvors will use explosive charges on the *Lusey* in their attempt to get access to more of its riches.

The English divers who belong to Tapson's team have steered clear of both Bemis and Fifty Fathom Ventures, but they are taking Bemis' threats seriously in one respect. They have published articles and photos from the expedition, disregarding Bemis' threats, but made it a point to state that money for their writing was being donated to diving research.

*Managing editor of aquaCorps' Wreckers issue, Theresa Foley is a freelance writer who resides in Santa Fe, NM, and Key West, FL. A former editor of the newspaper Space News, she has written hundreds of articles about the space program, more than a few stories about diving, and is working to publish her first novel. She can be contacted @ POB 9913, Santa Fe, NM 87504, email: 73521,2256@compuserve.com.*

## Planning for the Lusitania: Hyperbaric Chamber Info

Southern Ireland has no official recompression facility. Two months after the Tapson expedition completed their *Lusitania* dives, an Irish technical diver incurred severe injuries when he blew up from 280f/93m with no recompression during a dive to the wreck. He was flown to Cork Navy Chamber, where treatments began. (See Incident reports on page 98 for details.)

The Irish Navy and the Diving Disease Research Center, at Fort Bovisand, Plymouth in England agreed after the accident that the DDRC would be responsible for treating all cases of the bends in technical divers on the *Lusitania*.

The Irish Navy has a modest chamber at their base in Cork, but this chamber is on wheels and frequently goes on board their boats for sea-borne diving operations. Diving medical expertise is not available in the area.

Divers planning any *Lusitania* diving are asked to provide Dr. Maurice Cross, director of the DDRC, with a copy of their dive plan.

Maurice Cross MD, Director,  
DDRC,

Fort Bovisand, Plymouth  
Compuserve 100140,3225

The *Lusitania* has been visited infrequently during its 90 years on the ocean floor by a handful of adventurers diving on air and a small number of robotic vehicles.

Using an Aqualung rebreather, American John Light did a solo dive in 1960, proving the wreck was at the site. He then raised financial backing that allowed him to assemble a small team of divers for subsequent dives, all on air and using Aqualungs, in 1961-1963. Muriel Light, his wife, said the group did about three dives a week for a few months each year. They were limited to ten minutes on the bottom.

Light's diving was aimed at determining whether the *Lusitania* had in fact secretly carried munitions from the United States to England, as

the Germans charged during the war. His work was filmed for the BBC and NBC, Mrs. Light said. Light died in 1992, leaving behind volumes of research material that have not yet been published.

Whether other divers or salvors visited the wreck prior to Light is a subject of considerable speculation, and records of Light's visits say that he found evidence that wreck had been torn up and pillaged before he arrived.

In the summer of 1982, Oceaneering International sent saturation divers down to the *Lusitania* for numerous visits to recover the propellers, anchor and other artifacts, including the silver watch cases and collectible spoons.

The Oceaneering expedition was conducted in

conjunction with a British and an American television network, and the venture capitalist Greg Bemis, who claims to own the wreck. The purpose was to survey the site, learn about its sinking, and most importantly, to retrieve as many valuables as possible. Today, the Oceaneering public relations staff says all records and photographs of the work are lost. The records "aren't here, we don't have them," says Janet Charles, company spokeswoman. The only way to learn about the company's *Lusitania* work is from old magazine clippings.

In July 1993, oceanographer Robert Ballard and representatives of the National Geographic Society conducted an expedition using robotic and piloted underwater vessels to visit



the old shipwreck. Ballard described the *Lusitania* as looking "more like a junkyard than a luxury liner." The explorers took only pictures and videotape of the *Lusitania*, leaving all souvenirs behind. They did produce several television programs, an article in the society's magazine in April 1994 and a forthcoming book by Ballard based on the expedition. However, release of photos or information on the work is controlled by Bemis, as the other parties agreed to give him intellectual property rights to the

work. According to the two groups, Bemis says the photos are embargoed until Ballard's book is out.

The question of whether the *Lusitania* will become a popular site for technical divers was opened in 1994 with Polly Tapson's expedition conducting more than 100 dives. Two months later, four Irish technical divers made two dives each, with one resulting in a severe injury. The summer of 1995 is certain to bring more deep diving to the *Lusitania*, and with it, more controversy.

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