

## **Safety Tip of the Month, #2**

### **“Real Shallow Water Blackout Stories”**

Note: The names of live divers were left out of these stories.

#### **Once was Not Enough:**

In 1969 Roy Rogel, a San Diego Delta Free Diver and my teammate was diving off Solana Beach in a club tournament. During the meet, a fellow diver came across Roy lying motionless on the bottom at 40 feet in 15 foot visibility. What a coincident, but wait, there is more. The diver pulled his belt off and surfaced Roy. It happened that a commercial abalone diver & boat was near by. He shouted to the boat hand and she pulled her husband up by the hose, he was using hookah. His day job just happened to be Chief Lieutenant of San Diego's City Life Guards and yes he was trained in the new science of CPR (rare in those days to find someone trained in CPR). What a coincident, but wait, there is more. He had just installed a radio on his boat. He called for an ambulance and in those days they were called "meat wagons" since the drivers had no medical training and only rushed the ill/dieing/dead to the hospital but there was one crew in all of SD County that had just been certified in CPR, you guesses it, Roy got that crew. Solana Beach, the location for the tournament, had just put a road ramp from the high cliffs to the shore and finished it just weeks before the tournament so the ambulance could go straight to wet sand and get Roy off the ab diver's boat. What a coincident, but wait, there is more. At the hospital the Doctor on duty just happened to have interned in Hawaii and he had actually seen several cases of Shallow Water Blackout (SWB). Keep in mind, Roy showed no sign of life from the moment he was found until he got into the emergency room. The doctor revived Roy and he lived to dive another 11 years. Roy died in 1980 from his second SWB occurrence which also happened during a dive tournament. This time he was found on the surface but too late to recover. Roy was a highly decorated soldier and POW in WWII and escaped 5 times from the Germans and was recaptured 4 times. In his escapes well over 100 other men who were escaping with him died. Only 7 of his fellow escapees from all those escapes lived past the end of the war. Roy was already on his 8<sup>th</sup> life when I met him. A great diver, a great athlete, a great American and a dear friend lost to SWB.

Written In Memory of Roy by Doug Van Mullem.

#### **When I was a Young Jock:**

Many years before I learned of SWB, I use to believe that if I came up before seeing little white stars floating in my eyes that meant I wasn't pushing myself hard enough. Some days I would see stars on 20 to 30 dives. I also use to swim underwater in pools with no fins and go for 100 meters. In those swims I always came up seeing stars and the last time I did it I could see nothing but BLACK lasting for three breaths after surfacing and my friends, who I couldn't see, were saying "Look at how purple his lips are". That was my last time swimming 100 meters underwater.

Signed,  
Slow to Learn but Still Alive, DVM

**Too Good for My Own Good:**

I almost lost it last November in Belize. Unfortunately I was feeling too comfortable free diving to 45 feet and hanging for 2-2.5 minutes taking pictures of fish. No wetsuit and warm water made me feel like superman. As a result, I spent too much time waiting for a fish to turn the right way and as I headed for the surface my vision was super starry (which I've had mild cases before) then as I got to about 10 feet my brain could not control the muscle movements in my legs. I was saying to myself Kick Kick and nothing was happening. Lucky for me I had enough momentum and Pos buoyancy to get me out. As my face came out I almost couldn't figure out how to breath. I was telling myself inhale inhale! but my brain forgot how to do that. As I gasped for air and sputter kicked to keep my head out I recovered. That was the worst "close to blackout" as I've ever come. Like an idiot I was by myself, in my own little world mentally and 500 yards from the boat at the edge of a 250' drop off. That one event has changed my entire vision on how I dive in the future. That was a warning shot from the guy above and it was heard loud and clear.

In a way I can see how my good friend Steve Seo bought it. He went to Mexico with the mental place that he would return with a world record catch and permanent club record. I told Steve this story the day before he left. I wonder if he just blew it off thinking that could never happen to him....

Signed,  
One Who Lived & Learned

**Lessons to Learn to Help Prevent DEATH by SWB**

- 1) If you are surfacing and seeing little bright stars floating in your eyes (they look really cool) then you are pushing yourself too hard and are only a few seconds from death by SWB. Don't do that again!
- 2) If your legs are giving out as you push for the surface that is because the muscles are out of oxygenated blood. If your legs give out, you die. Don't do that again!
- 3) If you surface and feel like puking but you don't have the muscle strength to do it because there is no oxygen in them then you dove too hard. Don't do that again!
- 4) Here is one tip that few realize and it can save your life. You know you can dive 60' with no problem. But if you are doing extra hard & long dives, like when you are recovering a fish at 60' which is held up in the rocks or kelp, then your dive needs to be shorter since your exertion is greater. It will also take you a longer time to recover and with each dive it will take even more time to recover. You may feel like you are ready after 30 seconds because your lungs are full but you have deeply depleted the reserves of oxygen in your blood. Take an extra 30 seconds or minute to recover all of your blood in your body. Your legs will tell you when you are truly ready to dive because the numbness from a lack of oxygen will have left them. It takes a long time to recycle all your blood through your lungs to replenish the oxygen fully. Repeated deep hard dives will get you. Take the time to save your life! The fish isn't going anywhere but you may be if you don't take that extra breath.
- 5) Your attitude (or mind set) is what will keep you alive. Dive with safety as your first thought. It will be too late to have it as an after thought if you don't.
- 6) SWB victims can be recovered - take the time to be a responsible partner and learn CPR. An interesting thing about SWB is that you can shut off your throat and not take water into your lungs. You can also bite your snorkel so hard that it is hard for the rescuer to take it out of your mouth. If a rescuer turns you over with your snorkel in the mouth and you recover your first breath will be seawater. Rescuers need to be aware of this and try to get that snorkel out fast with a jerk when turning over the victim. This will hopefully open the airway, if not open it and do CPR.

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