

Mostly about People

By Wally Trabing



What Does One Say Underwater?

I'm a terrible conversationalist under water.

You'd think the cat(fish) had my tongue.

The scene: Demonstration of a newly-developed underwater voice communication system off the city's fireboat near the municipal wharf.

What it amounts to is an underwater public address system from boat to divers, from divers to boat or from diver to diver.

Most amazing piece of equipment.

When the regular Scuba divers had finished their testing, they entombed me in a Scuba wet suit, strapped a tank to my back, clamped two masks over the face and told me to go down and say something.

The city is considering buying this equipment for work around the wharf. Jack O'Neill, businessman of the sea who manufactures wet suits (sort of a snug black set of underwear that keeps you warm as goats milk in an ice cream cold sea), and surf boards, is the representative for this Bendix Watercom.

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I have never had the pleasure of breathing underwater before and while they were encasing me in this fearsome equipment I engaged myself in conversation — mostly little rhetorical phrases used by admitted cowards.

First of all a watertight combination loudspeaker and receiver is lowered some 10 feet over the side of the boat (about the size of a grapefruit); a receiver on deck allows one to hear water sounds and also broadcasts, via mike, into the water.

It can be understood underwater in a 200 feet radius.

Clear as an MC announcing hits runs and errors in a ball park.

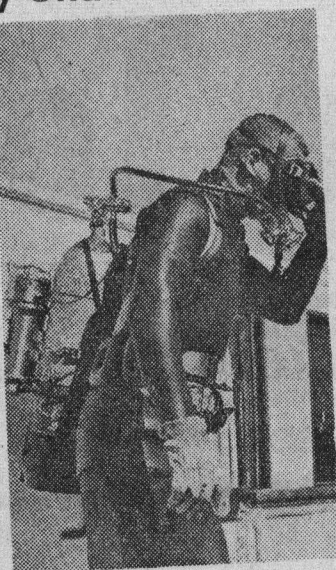
It's an amazing sensation down in the watery muckiness.

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On the diver's oxygen tank, independent of the boat system, is strapped a transistorized amplifier. The diver broadcasts from this from microphones strapped to his throat.

His conversation is picked up by the receiver dropped over the boatside, or by the ears of other divers in the area.

Well, I got down there and couldn't think of anything to



The Scuba Yakker

say — but finally came up with: "This is the first time I ever saw the bottom of the boat in the water." A brilliant statement that should go down in the annals of oceanography.

A voice came cleanly through the green water: "We can hear you well."

"One, two, three, four, five," I yelled, continuing our bon mot tet-a-tete.

Unlike most Scuba mouth masks which are inserted into the mouth, this mask surrounds the mouth, leaving the lips free to speak.

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And lest one deduces from this that I was daringly free-swimming below in the murky depths I must hasten to define my watery position — about 10 feet below the boat hanging, white-knuckled to the lower rung of the boat ladder.

And sucking in some of our clean, healthy wharf sea.

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Another amazing thing. When the microphone unit is lowered from the boat a symphony of crackling, bopping, cracking, nicking noises rent the air from the loudspeaker.

It was explained that the noises came from crabs, mussels, and other sea life on the bottom yakking away a mile a minute.

Without a doubt laughing their silly shells off over the long bowlegged diver who came down and made a fool of himself talking about boat bottoms.