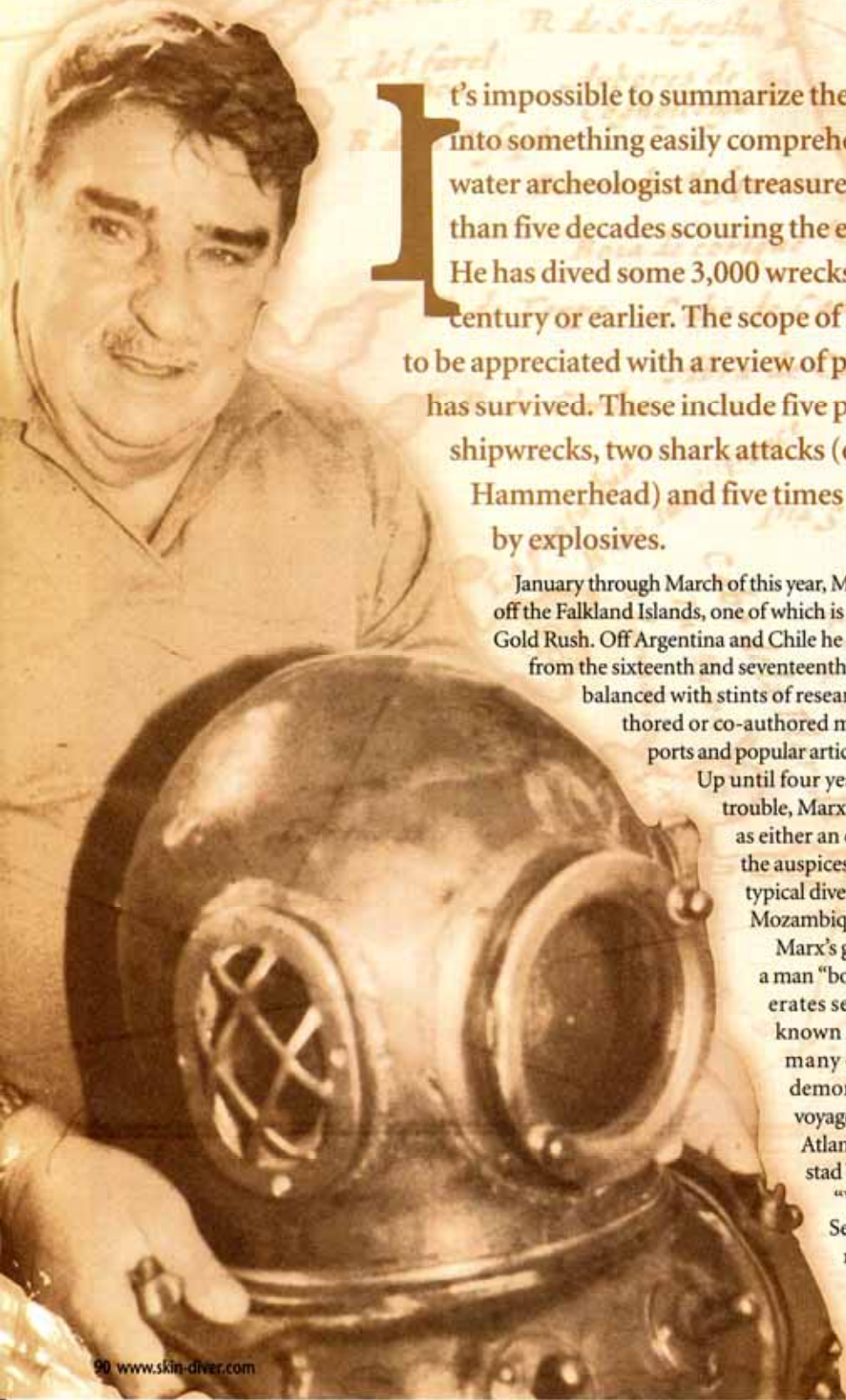


The H



It's impossible to summarize the resume of Robert F. Marx into something easily comprehended. A self-taught underwater archeologist and treasure hunter, he has spent more than five decades scouring the earth's seas for shipwrecks. He has dived some 3,000 wrecks that date to the eighteenth century or earlier. The scope of his adventures can just begin to be appreciated with a review of personal disasters his body has survived. These include five plane crashes, nine shipwrecks, two shark attacks (one Mako, one Hammerhead) and five times being blown out of the water by explosives.

January through March of this year, Marx was diving nineteenth century wrecks off the Falkland Islands, one of which is the only existing ship from the California Gold Rush. Off Argentina and Chile he has been researching two Spanish wrecks from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These months on location are balanced with stints of research, writing and lecturing. Marx has authored or co-authored more than 40 books and 800 scientific reports and popular articles on shipwrecks and their histories.

Up until four years ago, when he first experienced heart trouble, Marx spent 250 days a year in the water serving as either an expedition consultant or working under the auspices of his own research and salvage firms. A typical dive site might be in the Bahamas, Malaysia or Mozambique.

Marx's good friend Neal Watson describes him as a man "born out of his time." Watson, who now operates several dive resorts in the Bahamas, has known Marx since the late 1960s. Among their many escapades, the duo set out in 1969 to demonstrate the feasibility of pre-Columbian voyages to the New World by reenacting a trans-Atlantic voyage in a replica tenth century Gokstad Viking ship.

"We were reported missing in the North Sea," says Watson, "and decided we would rather be Phoenicians than Vikings. We sailed into Lisbon, Portugal and were promptly asked about our papers. We

Hard Way

a profile of Robert F. Marx

BY DARYL CARSON

said, 'No papers, we're Phoenicians.' We were standing on the dock, and they take Bob away in chains. Somehow he sorted out that we were Phoenicians and no threat to security, and they let us go. As it turns out, we failed to reach our destination, but ended up sailing farther than the original voyage would have been.

"I had sat and listened to stories and was truly mesmerized [by Marx]," says Watson. "I figured you only live once, so we did it. Bob is outrageous, but he's incredibly brilliant. There's a Jimmy Buffet song about a Pirate born 200 years too late. Bob is that. He lives in the wrong era."

Marx was born December 8, 1936 in Pittsburgh. At the age of nine he began to devour the books of Harry Reisburg, an author of romanticized treasure tales.

"Reisburg was such a fraud," says Marx. "All of his wrecks were intact and had treasure chests with an octopus on top and a skeleton guarding the whole thing. It was junk, but I fell for it."

By the time he was 12 years old Marx ran away from home. He went to the New Jersey coast where he worked for a Polish helmet diver. At 15, Marx headed to California where he met Mel Fisher, who then owned a dive shop in Redondo Beach. The pair became interested in underwater photography and then in making movies. They sold footage for use on TV.

During this time, Marx read about a wreck farther north in Drakes Bay and dove it with some Portuguese fishermen. It turned out to be the Manila Galleon *San Agustin*, lost in 1595. They found anchors, ballast, pistols, swords and broken shards. Marx was starting to get gold fever.

During this time, Marx explored several wrecks off the California coast. At one site he found 300 buttons stamped "Levi."

"I assumed brass would shine," says Marx, "and I thought these were buttons. I started giving them away to friends. When I had about 10 left, I gave a couple to a girl I was dating. Her father was a coin expert and informed me that my 'brass buttons' were actually some of the rarest currency around. They were gold coins produced by Levi of Levi blue jeans fame. He made his fortune during the gold rush prior to the establishment of the San Francisco mint, so he produced his

own money. When you start out new, you learn the hard way. Each coin I'd given away was worth between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a piece."

In 1953, Marx joined the Marine Corps and ultimately became director of the USMC Diving School in Vieques, Puerto Rico. But, on a six-month cruise through the Mediterranean, Marx had an experience that would change his life.

"A cable got caught in the props of our carrier," says

Marx. He dove beneath the ship to sort out the tangled mess. "I looked down and below me on the bottom was a stack of bronze cannons. That experience really started my treasure hunting." On this cruise Marx eventually discovered wrecks off Spain, France, Libya, Italy, Greece and Egypt.

Three years after enlisting, Marx took his leave of the Marine Corps and went back to California. He attended UCLA, majoring in anthropology and archeology, and completed 90 undergraduate credit hours. Back in California he again partnered with Mel Fisher. Some of Marx's underwater film footage had been used in the Oscar-winning documentary *The Sea Around Us*, and he received a financial windfall. Flush with cash, he agreed to go with Fisher to shoot movies off Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. His month-long stay dragged into four and a half years.



Recovered off Florida from the 1715 Spanish treasure fleet.

"I started the first hotel in Cozumel. There were 12 rooms, and I charged eight bucks a day for meals and diving. Booze was on the honor system for 25 cents a drink. I ran the resort and found wrecks."

Launching out from Cozumel, Marx began to search for wrecks all over the Caribbean. Everywhere he went he sought the help of local fishermen who might know the location of "guns" (cannons) and "river rocks" (ballast stones). His efforts paid off, but while he found "a hell of a lot of treasure" he was continually frustrated by efforts to identify the wrecks he was finding. He decided to do the research himself, and his pursuits took him to Spain for two and a half

"I started the first hotel in Cozumel...I charged eight bucks a day for meals and diving. Booze was on the honor system for 25 cents a drink. I ran the resort and found wrecks."

years where he poured over ancient documents, many of them written in old Spanish, a phonetically written combination of Basque, French, Italian, Portuguese, Latin and other languages. The research spawned much of Marx's academic and popular writings.

Marx voluminous accomplishments include finding the Civil War ironclad *Monitor*. He directed the archeological excavation of the sunken city of Port Royal in Jamaica from 1965 through 1968. In 1973 and 1974, at the invitation of the Lebanese Department of Antiquities, Marx explored ancient Phoenician seaports and discovered shipwrecks dating from the fifth century B.C. up to the sixth century A.D. They included two Greek, two Roman and one Byzantine wreck. In 1987 and 1988 Marx discovered two Manila galleons off the coast of Guam, the *Nuestra Senora del Pilar*, lost in 1690, and the *Nuestra Senora del Buen Viaje*, lost in 1754.

Each of these finds is wedged tightly between scores of other discoveries, other treasures found and more blank spaces filled in the annals of the world's

maritime history.

Does all of this make Marx a hero? It does, at least to those who sit in their office cubicles and dream of a life only half as daring, but it has also made him a villain in the eyes of many academics. His work, both in locating and researching ships, cannot be denied, and his singular effort may never be duplicated. However, that has not prevented criticism for alleged lack of detail in handling artifacts and his willingness to sell treasure. Marx answers these charges by citing professional jealousy. He's doing it, they're not. Has he sold treasure? Sure, but not precious one-of-a-kind artifacts, only duplicates. Does he record every detail of sunken wrecks? It's a pointless endeavor on shallow, scattered wrecks, although valuable on deeper sites, he says.

Dr. Jim Miller is the chief of archeological research for the Florida Division of Historical Resources. He has gotten to know Marx over the past two decades, as the salvage industry has been rocked by intense debates over wreck ownership.

"A lot of these kinds of debates and arguments go away," says Miller. "It's not that I agree with everything he has done, but I respect who he is. He has always been on the side of responsible government regulation."

Miller also credits Marx with opening up the world of shipwrecks to the general public. "Bob has been a spokesperson who has recognized interest in shipwrecks by the non-specialist. I think people appreciate that he has opened up to them something very unique."

Today Marx is still wreck hunting. He is occasionally accompanied on location by Jennifer, his wife of 30 years. Marx has four daughters between the ages of 28 and 41. "The oldest one I delivered myself on Cozumel," he says. "I just married the wee one off a couple of weeks ago."

When asked what else he hopes to find, Marx laughs. "I guess what I'd really like to find is the Fountain of Youth. I've got lots of aches and pains."

Whatever discomforts his body endures, they have not squelched the ambitions first felt by a nine-year-old reading treasure tales. After a lifetime of discovery, Marx knows better than anybody that there are still thousands of shipwrecks yet to be found. 🐟



Golden doubloons. The mere mention of this antique Spanish currency fires the imagination. In *Moby Dick*, Captain Ahab spurred his men into a frenzy of desire by nailing a golden doubloon to the mast of the *Pequod*, as reward for the first sailor to sight the great whale.

Pirates and other sea dogs prowled the trade routes and ports of the Caribbean to fill their pirate chests with this treasure coin. Lost fortunes of men whose world was dominated by the whimsy of the weather, commanded by the compass and confined to a few square feet of creaking wooden deck may still remain buried in

the sea's shifting sands. But despite a life at sea, almost none of the men that stood before the mast dared peer below the surface of the water. To superstitious sailors, most of whom couldn't swim, the sea was an adversary and the creatures within were the devil's denizens.

So Little Cayman's Bloody Bay Wall, the color-laden coral world off St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the breathtaking drop-offs beneath St. Lucia's sky-piercing pitons remained a dark world of blue mystery. And although many a man hid out in the secluded cays of the Bahamas, none cavorted with dolphins and certainly none would have considered a shark

feed the highlight of a "Pirate's Holiday."

Two Fathoms Below the Mast

Today, of course, we roam the Caribbean in search of

adventure below the mast. And modern-day treasure seekers like Bob Marx prowl the sands and reefs below the surface with the same swaggering verve and single-minded audacity as the treasure seekers who came before him. As for Captain Ahab—he would probably light the very air afire if upon hearing, "Thar she blows!" he saw his men jump in the water off Dominica armed with only cameras and silly grins, simply wanting to savor an encounter with the mighty Sperm Whale.

But such is the diver's life. And such is the treasure we seek. 🐬

TY SAWYER, SENIOR EDITOR

time capsules

By Tamara Collins

Each month *Skin Diver* looks back through its pages in search of those little nuggets of yesteryear—old equipment, trends of the time, new discoveries—that echo the times and may surprise or shock us. It's good to know your roots and how discoveries of old have helped shape diving today.

1982



The Quest for Treasure

Skin Diver has had a long love affair with underwater treasure, archaeology and salvage. One of its first articles on the pursuit of the relics that lie beneath was written by Robert Marx (profiled this issue on page 90) in September 1955. The 21-year-old marine had just found the *Monitor*, the Civil War Iron-Clad lost in 1862 off the coast of North Carolina. Marx contributed several articles throughout the years, until he finally landed on the cover in April 1982. Inside, his article tracked the history of treasure hunting, revealing what still holds true today—it is big business, with millions of dollars invested and millions spent on the gamble that riches still lie for the taking beneath the sea. 🐟



1977

On the Set of the Deep

Many celebrities have landed on the cover of *Skin Diver*, from Lloyd Bridges to Sean Connery, but none have caused quite the stir that this T-shirt clad actress did in June 1977. Apparently, Jacqueline Bisset was not too happy about this revealing photograph, taken in Bermuda on the set of *The Deep*. Also filmed in the British Virgin Islands and Australia, Peter Benchley's *The Deep* was "the biggest and most expensive undersea film ever made..." and utilized "the world's largest underwater set." It was big news in the diving community, containing all the elements of a diver's fantasy—treasure, wrecks and sharks. On the set were two of the best underwater photographers in the business, Stan Waterman and Al Giddings. 🐟



1967



What Ever Happened to Liquid Air?

It could have been the wave of the future; the "dawn of a new era in diving." It was lightweight, compact, carried a six- to eight-hour air supply, was easy to use, and as of the printing of this article in June 1967, seemed relatively safe. Cryogenics had been used in research laboratories, aerospace and medicine, so why not scuba? This was what prompted Jim Woodberry to invent the liquid air scuba device, which was made up of "a pair of Dewar tanks to hold and insulate the liquid air" and a system of pipes, valves, warming coils and tubing that transformed the liquid air to breathable air. The system's estimated cost was about \$300 to the diver, but dive shops would have to invest around \$9,000. Was it the investment of money or imagination that put the freeze on cryogenic scuba? 🐟



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