

Under the Sea With S.E.D.



by John Pokorny

Visions of lifeless bodies raced through my mind as we inched our way across the murky depths of Rodriguez Reservoir just east of Tijuana.

Visibility was zero, our lights were useless, and the bottom of the lake was covered with trash, submerged trees and barbed wire.

As I felt my way along the bottom, my mind flashed back to dive training.

I remembered my instructor talking about lobster, abalone, spearfishing, sunshine and clear water. Little did I realize what lay in store for me, as a diver in the S.E.D.

The assignment last September was to recover 18 drowning victims who had been thrown into the water at Rodriguez Reservoir when a homemade raft, on which they were riding, capsized.



ASTREA jet and 10-E-42 take turns deploying and extracting divers during a training exercise at San Vicente Reservoir.



ASTREA helps S.E.D. divers get to the dive site.

The request, originating with the Tijuana police, came through International Affairs to S.E.D.

The Code 14 (dive call-out) was issued and our S.E.D. divers responded.

We assembled at S.D.P.D. Southern Station for the trip across the border. We met our escort of Tijuana police at the border then proceeded Code 3 to Rodriguez Reservoir.

Station M was monitoring Frequency One and heard units rolling Code 3 but was unable to determine who or where they were. The units rolling Code 3 were requested to identify. There was a long pause. Finally 10-Edward-7 came back, stating, "We're rolling Code 3 in Mexico!"

The humor of the radio transmission quickly faded upon our arrival at the scene, where parents and families of the victims had gathered to await recovery of the bodies.

The situation was tragic because most of the victims were children. The extreme poverty of the area overwhelmed us, especially when the parents of the victims brought us food meant for their own children. That they could be so generous under such tragic circumstances was touching.

Each of the meals provided for us was eaten while hungry children looked on, and with the certain knowledge that each member of these families was sacrificing for us. Yet the pride of these poor parents would not allow us to decline their generosity.

During the four days of diving, all the bodies were recovered as the families patiently waited on shore. After packing up our equipment for the drive back to San Diego, I said a silent prayer of thanks for another dive completed safely.



Coast Guard deploys S.E.D. diver during a multi-agency training exercise off Solana Beach.

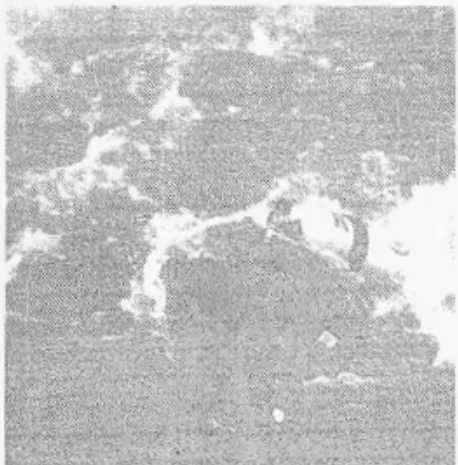
When the subject of scuba diving comes up, most people have a mental picture of La Jolla Shores on a clear, sunny day. San Diego County has a variety of diving conditions which are quite diverse.



Unit 10-E-42, S.E.D.'s dive boat, is the sole component of the SDSO Navy.

Most people are unaware of the different types of dive requests given to the S.E.D. dive team. These requests originate from within the department or from any city/county agency desiring assistance in anything related to underwater search and recovery.

Dive requests vary from the ocean to lakes, ponds, rivers and just about anything that will hold enough water in it to dive in. The purpose may be searching for lost/stolen property, evidence, or homicide or drowning victims.



Swift water training in 7 knots of current.

Some of the more recent requests the S.E.D. dive team members have been sent on are:

1) Recover stolen property from Lakeside's Lindo Lake (which consists of 10% water, 40% algae and 50% duck____!, needless to say, zero visibility).

2) Search/recover the body of a missing duck hunter from Lake Henshaw. That was a cold weather, cold water (42 degrees) and almost zero visibility dive.

3) Search/recover the body of a drowned diver from the canyon off La Jolla Shores. This was a deep dive, going to 130 feet.

4) Search the Ramona Sewage Treatment settlement ponds for bodies of a recent double homicide. (After this search, S.E.D. personnel lined up for tetanus and gamma globulin shots!)

Needless to say, most of our dives are under less than desirable conditions and a majority are zero visibility! When a dive request involving clear, warm water comes into the office, you can hear the sighs of relief.

San Diego has numerous flood problems during the rainy season and dive emergencies can come at a moment's notice.

S.E.D. divers carry their basic dive equipment with them in their vehicles and are able to respond to a dive call-out upon receiving a page.

There is a reserve dive group which supports S.E.D. and is actively involved in many of the dive requests. These reserve divers



"Yeow—this is cold!" Diver Keith Blackburn.

supply all of their own equipment and donate their time.

Reserve personnel practices with S.E.D. divers on regular training days and also put in eight hours a month on their own. There is a deep satisfaction which comes from being able to provide valuable service to the community through the S.E.D. dive team.

There are benefits to having an interest in scuba diving, both in work related and in personal pleasure diving.

But remember, when you hear the words "S.E.D. diver," and they sound exciting, even tempting... think of the Ramona Sewage Treatment ponds!