

The HangLine

Issue #06-06

Posted November 25th, 2006

Armchair Tekkies

The Thirteen deaths occurred in 1996 where people were performing technical dives and of those thirteen, only three were certified as technical divers and had the proper equipment. One cannot help but look at these statistics and believe that the problem was related to a lack of respect for the knowledge and skill required to dive technically. Those who fail to gain the experience and the training necessary to dive to extended ranges, in overhead environments, with mixed gases or nitrox and dive decompression are what we refer to as 'Armchair Tekkies'. They take unnecessary risk because they do not know any better yet persist in dabbling in the activity because its appeal either feeds an ego, an image or a lifestyle.

There are two components to graduating from the 'Armchair'. One is experience, and the other is training. First let's discuss experience. It begins with excellent physical and mental fitness levels, a requirement that must be met before someone begins to train as a diver, at any level. For basic levels of diving, you must be comfortable in the water with satisfactory swimming skills but when a diver starts to haul around extra tanks and equipment deeper into environments that are more unpredictable, he must be in good

cardiovascular shape and fit emotionally. With that, a diver needs to gain experience, and lots of it before he progresses any further into the realm of extended ranges. A person needs to get to know himself and his equipment intimately and discover what his limits are. This takes time and cannot be just read about or assumed through common sense.

Once any training is complete, a diver must then progress slowly, extending his limits, gradually gaining valuable experience with each small step. There isn't a person on this planet who has enough natural ability to accelerate through this stage, for it is here that the familiarity and intuition needed to evaluate risk is gained.

In addition to the skills and knowledge necessary to plan dives, risk is what a diver learns about in a training course. It is true, an 'Armchair Tekkie' can read about gas planning, equipment configuration, generating dive tables and decompression techniques, and common sense helps one deploy this information. But only Risk-Benefit Analysis skills can be safely developed in formal training courses. An experienced instructor will teach about the many obscure problems that can occur. As a dive plan becomes more involved, the





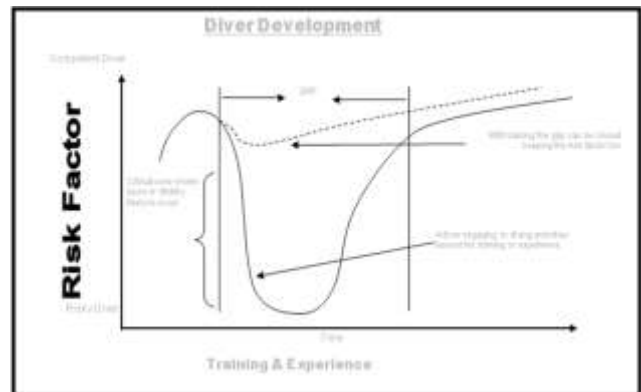
complexity of the contingency planning in turn is exponentially affected. There are a great many issues that are not so obvious that can interfere with an accurate Risk-Benefit Analysis and that is where the untrained diver will have problems.

An alarming trend has developed within the community of new divers. When divers are first certified, their respect for the diving environment, personal preparation and dive planning are strong. They began their diving career as safe divers who did not take a lot of risk. As many continued to dive, they gained a confidence in their ability to dive deeper, longer and into environments that were much more challenging and involved more risk. The key point here is that risk in advanced diving activity can be reduced by continuing education.

Sadly some divers do not recognize the need for additional training, and because they might maintain a Divemaster or Instructor rating, feel qualified to dive into extended ranges. They unknowingly enter a zone of high-risk activity (see Figure). It is not long before they enter the critical zone where injury or death becomes a significant probability. Fortunately many divers either scare themselves enough to back-off on their limits and take training before an accident occurs, or eventually through time and the school of hard knocks learn from their mistakes. Continued diver training helps close the gap, eliminating the critical stage where divers are predisposed to unnecessary risk.

One of the biggest excuses individuals make to as to why they do not take

advantage of formal diver training is the cost of advanced level or 'technical' diving courses. It is true that many of these courses are very expensive compared to basic entry level diving courses but the level of experience and training an Instructor must have and must also pass on is much more intensive. Interestingly enough, the cost of the course is often minor compared to the cost of the equipment needed to safely complete an extended range dive. If you cannot afford the course you likely cannot finance the proper equipment to be that kind of diver. Divers also confuse higher levels of training certifications such as Divemaster, Instructor or entry level Wreck Courses as acceptable qualifications to dive extended range - they are not.



Many great diving pioneers learned on their own and gained the skills and knowledge through practical experience, yet they had to survive a lot of high-risk activities (many in fact did not). The training programs were not available for them to take advantage of yet if any one of them could have learned through a formal training program, they would have. Ask one and they would tell you to get off your 'Armchair' and get trained. ~ *The Gang at DFP*

