



# Atlanta Underwater Explorers

## *AUE Bubbles*

September 15, 2014  
Volume 2 Issue 5

The Atlanta Underwater Explorers, P. O. Box 55048, Atlanta, GA 30308  
[www.diveaue.org](http://www.diveaue.org)

## Lessons for Life: Fatal One-Way Trip to the Bottom

*By Eric Douglas*

Natalie was uncomfortable with the dive gear she was wearing but decided to ignore her uneasiness. She really wanted to see this shipwreck. Natalie made a giant stride from the boat, and though she struggled a bit on the surface with the extra gear and weight, she was convinced she would be fine once she got underwater. She began venting the air from her BC, and almost immediately dropped below the surface and out of sight.

### THE DIVER

Natalie had made 24 lifetime dives, nearly all of them in warm water. She owned her gear, but the heaviest wetsuit she had was a 2mm one piece suit.

### THE DIVE

It was a clear and cold morning when Natalie and her dive buddy, Steve, boarded the boat for the trip out of a recently discovered shipwreck in the Great Lakes. The ship rested in 50 feet of water, listing slightly to port. All of her friends told the dive was fantastic, but the water temperature was something she needed to be prepared for. Natalie decided to rent a drysuit.

She had ever dived in a drysuit before, but Natalie reasoned that it couldn't be that different from a wetsuit. Steve was comfortable diving in a drysuit, but he didn't have any experience helping someone else set one up. They guessed at how much weight she'd need, and finally decided that Natalie would wear the same amount as Steve. She was much smaller than Steve, but they reasoned that the extra weight would help her to descend. Neither of them wanted her to struggle to get down.

### THE ACCIDENT

Once suited up, the divers made their way to the swim step and donned their fins. Natalie added air to her BC. It was the same one she used when diving in the Caribbean, and she was comfortable with it. Steve completed this giant stride first and made himself buoyant on the surface while he waited for Natalie.

Natalie completed her giant stride entry and slowly bobbed to the surface. She had to kick to keep her head above water as she and Steve

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Lesson for Life: Fatal One-Way Trip to the Bottom
- 2 Lesson for Life: Cont.
- 3 Lesson for Life: Cont.
- 4 AUE Activities Update



*Lessons for Life: Fatal One-Way Trip to the Bottom - Jori Bolto*

---

*“Natalie put her regulator in her mouth and took a deep breath while she released air from her BC. As soon as she exhaled she dropped below the surface.”*

---

## Lessons for Life: Fatal One-Way Trip to the Bottom – Cont.

swam to the bow to begin their decent. They agreed they were ready for the dive even though Steve could tell Natalie was winded trying to stay on the surface. Natalie put her regulator in her mouth and took a deep breath while she released air from her BC. As soon as she exhaled she dropped below the surface. Steve descended only a few feet before he saw Natalie rocket past him to the bottom. She had a panicked look in her eyes and frantically tried to grab her nose to equalize. The unfamiliar gloves she wore made that nearly impossible. Realizing Natalie was in trouble. Steve returned to the surface and shouted for help. The boat's divemaster immediately jumped to action, suiting up and descending the anchor line, but by the time they found her, Natalie had drowned.



### ANALYSIS

Enthusiasm for diving and exploration is a wonderful thing, as long as it is tempered with the understanding that you don't know everything about every dive environment. Natalie's experience included 24 dives in warm tropical environments. Diving in warm salt water is not the same as cold fresh water. Natalie's biggest problem revolved around her equipment and lack of familiarity with its use. Dive accidents involving failed equipment are rare, but accidents involving the improper use of equipment are much more common.

Drysuits are wonderful tools, and Natalie's drysuit was not the cause of her problems. Attempting to make a dive in a drysuit without understanding how to use one was. She didn't understand that she needed to adjust her buoyancy under using the drysuit itself, not the BC on her back. If Natalie had added air to her suit on the surface, once she deflated her BC, she would not have descended so rapidly.

If Natalie had taken a drysuit-diver course, she would have understood her weight requirements. She would have taken time to get comfortable with the controls of the suit and learned how to make a safe descent and ascent. The extreme overweighting caused her to drop like a stone. In a moment she went from diver excited about a dive to a panicked diver racing toward the bottom. The pain in her ears would have been extreme for a brief period until her eardrums burst inward from the water pressure. She was descending too quickly to equalize, even if she had been able to pinch her nose with the gloves.

Last, Natalie used her warm-water BC for this dive. It was designed for tropical warm-water environments, where divers wear light weight exposure protection and very little weight. It did not have sufficient lift to support her in the water with the equipment and weight she was wearing, especially without adding air to the suit itself. Like any tool or piece of equipment, BDs are designed for different situations and uses.

---

*“Attempting to make a dive in a drysuit without understanding how to use one was. She didn't understand that she needed to adjust her buoyancy under using the drysuit itself, not the BC on her back.”*

---

## Lessons for Life: Fatal One-Way Trip to the Bottom – Cont.

It is debatable whether Steve should have stayed with his buddy or ascended and attempted to get help as he did. If he had descended, he could have jettisoned her weights and brought Natalie back to the surface. To do that, he would have had very rapidly himself, just to keep up, and possibly injured himself in the process. He was not experienced at performing dive rescues, so it is likely he didn't know what to do. Many divers don't. An inexperienced diver attempt to make a rescue can sometimes put two people in trouble instead of just one.

### Lessons for Life

1. **Gain experience with an instructor** if you aren't familiar with diving environment
2. **Take time to learn** to use new equipment properly
3. **Make a buoyancy check** in a safe environment prior to a dive using unfamiliar equipment.
4. **Be ready to call any dive at any time** if you feel uncomfortable. In this situation, Natalie could have returned to the boat when she was struggling and winded on the surface
5. **Get rescue-diver training and learn skills** in case you are called upon to rescue a dive buddy.

Published in Scuba Diving Magazine

<http://www.scubadiving.com/training/lessons-life/lessons-life-fatal-one-way-trip-bottom>



---

*“An experienced diver attempt to make a rescue can sometimes put two people in trouble instead of just one.”*

---

## Upcoming AUE Activities

- **AUE General Meeting - Saturday 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. September 20, 2014, 400 Flat Shoals Ave. SE, Atlanta, GA 30313**  
**Note:** Meeting time change due to scheduling conflict at East Atlanta Library.
- **Dive Panama City, FL with AUE & Diver's Den September 27 & 28, 2014**  
See trip flyer on AUE website for details  
<http://www.diveaue.org/info/Dive%20Panama%20City%20FL.pdf>
- **DIVERSe Orlando Jupiter Dive September 13, 2014** Call Jupiter Dive Center to reserve space (561) 745-7807
- **AUE Tailgate Party and Atlanta Falcons vs. Chicago Bears football game - October 12, 2014.** Tickets can be purchased via Ticketmaster for: \$73.05 (\$65.00 ticket + \$8.05 convenience fee)  
Details: TBA

## Recent AUE Activities

- **AUE General Meeting - August 16, 2014**  
See published meeting minutes for highlights and details.
- **AUE Members participate in YWP Coral Restoration program in Florida Keys.**  
<http://www.coralrestoration.org/>



Atlanta Underwater  
Explorers  
**AUE Bubbles**

## Editor's Corner

### Fellow AUE Members:

Welcome to the September 2014 edition of, *AUE Bubbles* bi-monthly newsletter. We hope you continue to find future editions informative. Your suggestions, comments and story ideas are welcomed.

Completed story submissions must be received one week prior to the publishing date (Bi-monthly on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month). The next edition will be published November 15, 2014. All stories are reviewed for content and edited to meet standard publishing guidelines prior to publication.

Please submit your story ideas and comments to my attention via email.

Dive safely,

Alex Adams,

*Publisher & Editor*

[scuba1aja@gmail.com](mailto:scuba1aja@gmail.com)