

The Father of East Coast Wreck Diving, Michael “Mike” deCamp, has passed away

Mike deCamp's contribution to the sport of scuba diving spanned over nearly sixty years.

Mike deCamp, first learned to dive in the Caribbean in 1954, and has never looked back. A true pioneer in East Coast wreck diving, he first started diving the shipwrecks off New Jersey in 1957, and continued to dive them up until just a few years ago. He passed away peacefully at home with his wife Wesley and family at his side on April 9th 2013. Mike was 87 years old.

Already an accomplished amateur photographer in the early 1950s, it seemed only natural for Mike to take his craft with him as he descended below the waves. If it wasn't for Mike deCamp, there would be no early photographic records of such wrecks as the Stolt Dagali, Pinta, Texas Tower, Ayuruoca, Varanger, USS Bass, USS San Diego, Oregon, U-boats 85, 352, and 853, along with many others. Time, and the sea have taken their toll on these sunken ships and subs. Thanks to deCamp, they continued to live on, and be recognizable as the majestic vessels they once were.

Considered by many as the 'Father of East Coast Wreck Diving', Mike deCamp's articles and photographs have offered an intriguing look into the hidden world below the waves, and has given countless numbers of divers a closer look at some of the marvelous wonders that await them just below the waves off our eastern shores, and has inspired many to take their cameras down to the wrecks.

In the early 1960s, deCamp was writing articles for Skin Diver magazine and other popular magazines of the time. All of these articles helped highlight the many fine shipwrecks that were right off the New Jersey and New York shores. His stunning underwater photographs brought to light the tragedy of a sudden collision, the massiveness of the wrecks on the bottom, the destructive power of war at sea, and the awesome destructive power of nature itself.

Mike deCamp was taking photos of shipwrecks before many of today's divers were even born; yet, mention the name "deCamp" and almost every East Coast shipwreck diver knows whom you are referring to, and has seen some of his photos.

Using a double hose regulator, an ill-fitting hard rubber, home made wetsuit and primitive mask and fins, he was first to photograph the wreck of the Dutch freighter PINTA shortly after it was rammed and sank 8 miles off Shark River Inlet, New Jersey in May of 1963. His black and white photographs of divers wearing triple tanks gliding over the sunken freighter appeared in *LIFE* magazine among others publications. Mike also led the first team of divers to locate and dive the sunken section of the Stolt Dagali.

He chartered a fishing trawler and went out to look for the wreck three days after it sunk in late November 1964. He found the wreck by first motoring downstream of the reported collision point, found a large oil slick, then traveled upstream through the slick that covered the ocean's surface. He continued up the stream until he came to the point where bubbles were breaking the surface. He had found the Stolt, miles from its reported sinking location! Mike's team also located and recovered the only person found of the 19 souls lost when the Stolt went down.

On assignment for the National Geographic Society in 1965, Mike was lead diver in a three-diver team conducting studies on seals in Antarctica. deCamp dove in a ¼" wetsuit, wore twin 72cu.ft. steel tanks and used his signature double hose regulator!

In 1966, Mike deCamp, along with other East Coast wreck diving legend George Hoffman, organized the first charter to the Andrea Doria. It was on Mike's Doria trip the following year, 1967, that the compass and binnacle were found and recovered. Mike deCamp, along with George Hoffman and a handful of others were founding members of the Eastern Divers Association, one of the pioneer diving organizations of the 1960's and

1970's that specialized in deep wreck diving. Mike was there onboard many of those charters when a new wreck was found. It was Mike deCamp's Skin Diver article in January 1968, that heralded the discovery of the American submarine, USS Bass, off of Block Island.

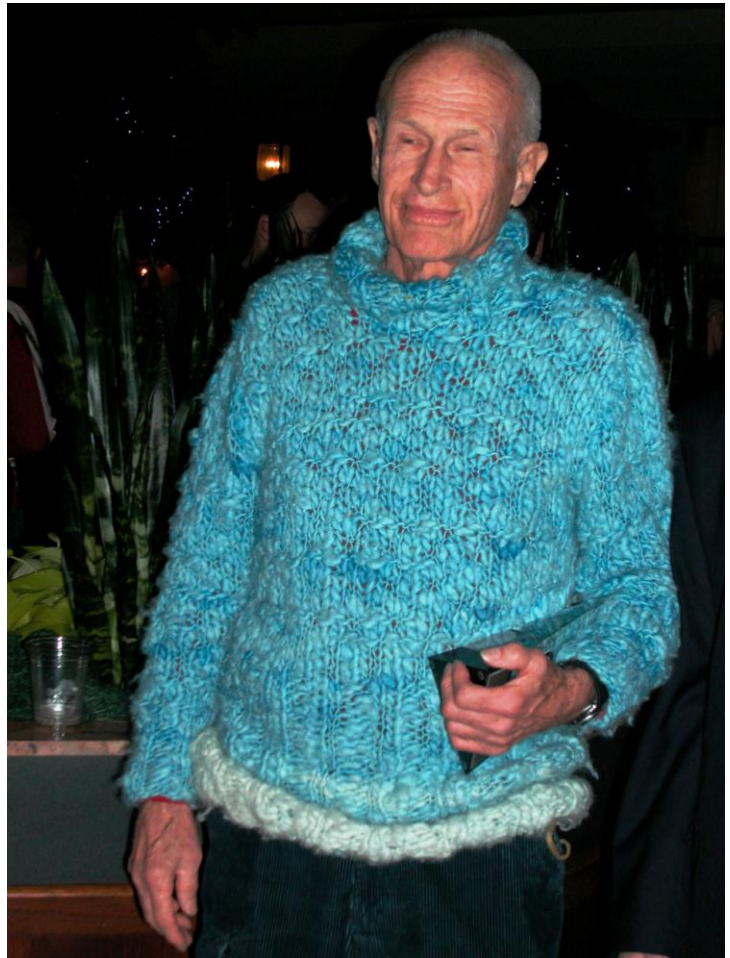
Mike had many many "firsts" when it came to diving, being either one of the first divers on a particular wreck, or the first to photograph the wreck or one of the divers who first properly identified a particular here-to-fore unnamed shipwreck. Adding one more "first" for Mike's long list of 'firsts', was in 2010 when he was the "FIRST" to receive the prestigious Pioneer of Northeast Diving award at the Beneath The Sea conference in Secaucus, NJ.

Considered by many as the 'Father of East Coast Wreck Diving', this diving legend surely will be remembered and missed by thousands of divers and diving enthusiasts for the many contributions he has given to the scuba diving community and maritime history enthusiasts alike.

We remember you and will miss you Mike.



Mike deCamp suiting up in 1965
(from deCamp collection)



Mike deCamp w/Pioneer of Northeast Diving Award
Beneath The Sea-2010