



Shipwreck Photographer Leigh Bishop

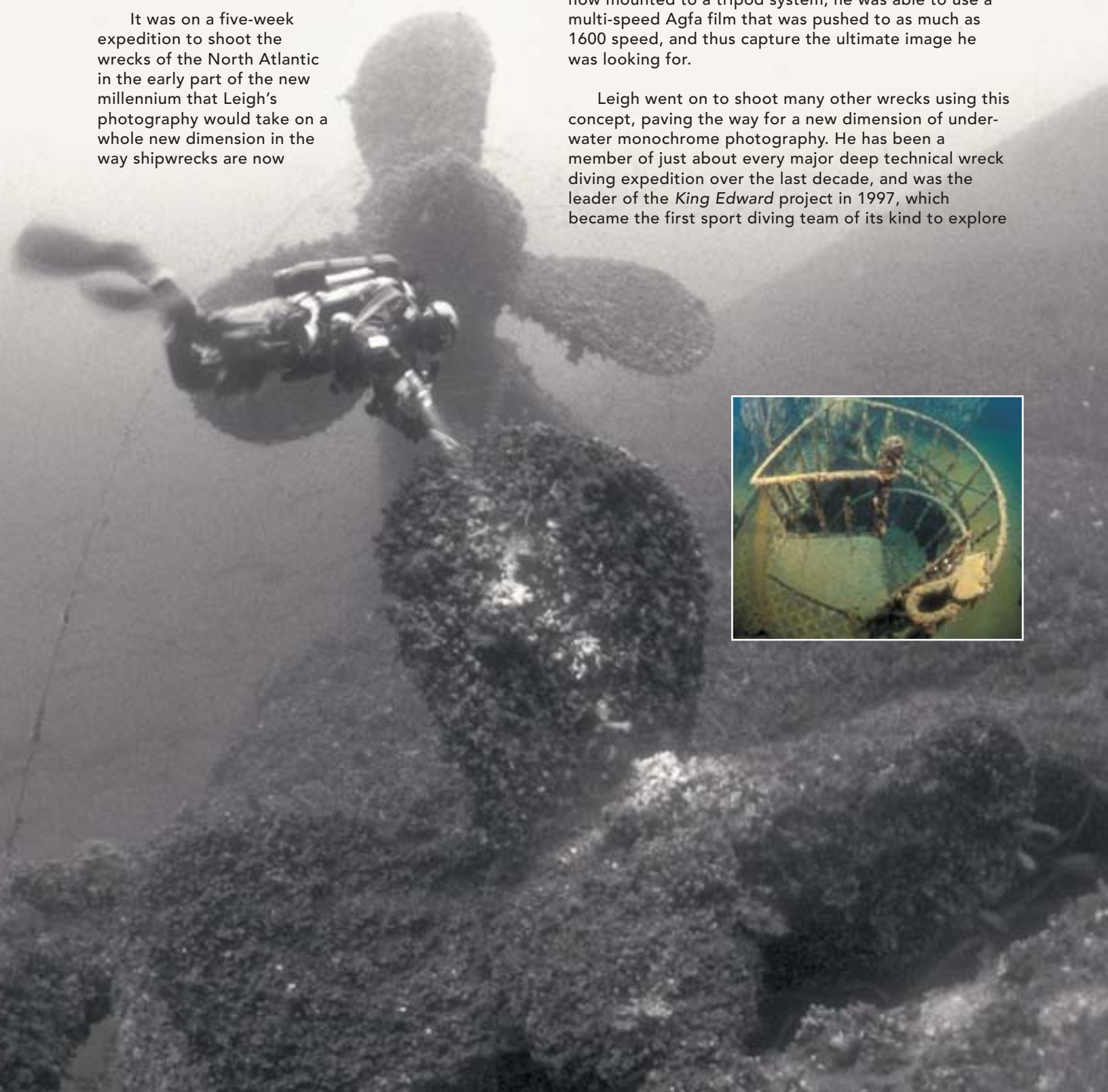
Leigh Bishop is a wreck diver who has been diving for almost twenty years, a diver focused on the specialized field of shooting stills of deep-water shipwrecks. He began shooting deep wrecks a decade ago in 1998 when he was invited to join an expedition to *Britannic*, *Titanic*'s larger but less known sister ship, sunk in 400ft/120m depth off Athens, Greece. A typical wreck diver of the day, he was looking for a challenge during this milestone technical diving expedition, and thus set himself the task of shooting stills.

By the end of 1998, he invested in a Nikon F90x and Aquatica housing with some big Sea & Sea strobes. The housing was rated to 330ft/100m and the strobes to 200ft/60m, which was sufficient to see out the end of the 1990's diving the *Lusitania* and other wrecks. But then the projects with his team went deeper, as did his equipment. The next step was the famous ocean liner and gold ship *Egypt* lost off of France in 126m/415ft depth. The Aquatica housing stood up to all expectations, going well beyond its operating depth and, of course, brought the images to the surface.

It was on a five-week expedition to shoot the wrecks of the North Atlantic in the early part of the new millennium that Leigh's photography would take on a whole new dimension in the way shipwrecks are now

photographed by him and others that followed. While shooting the majestic bow of the liner *Justicia* with flash photography in a depth of 230ft/70m, Leigh was not happy with the results. What he had seen with his naked eye was the image he wanted: this huge shipwreck disappearing into the distance in fabulous visibility. Thinking hard about this, he returned to the North Atlantic the following year with a new venture, "time exposure photography." The concept had been staring him in the face — simple time-lapse photography as used by land photographers. Armed with his Aquatica now mounted to a tripod system, he was able to use a multi-speed Agfa film that was pushed to as much as 1600 speed, and thus capture the ultimate image he was looking for.

Leigh went on to shoot many other wrecks using this concept, paving the way for a new dimension of underwater monochrome photography. He has been a member of just about every major deep technical wreck diving expedition over the last decade, and was the leader of the *King Edward* project in 1997, which became the first sport diving team of its kind to explore



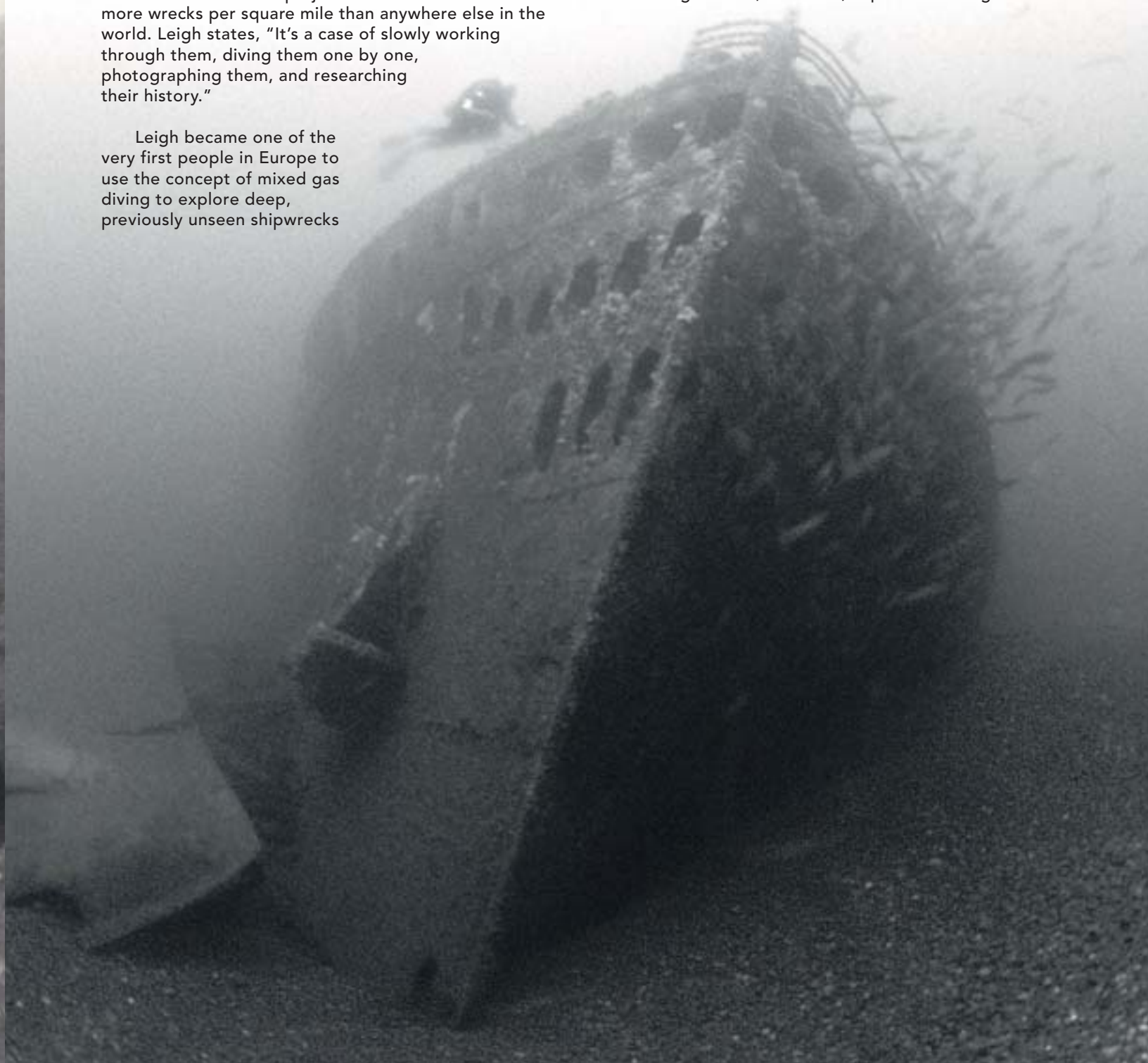
and document a wreck in depths greater than 380ft/ 115m. Since then, he has systematically shot expeditions as they unfold above and below the water, reporting them as a photo-journalist. Now reaching 40 years of age, he continues to work as a full-time professional fire fighter as he has for the last 15 years, north of London where he lives. Wreck diving and photography is something he chooses to do during his time off at weekends and annual leave periods.

Another reason why he originally began shooting stills underwater was to collect images for a book — that he continues to work on fourteen years later — which will document all the deep wrecks in the English Channel. This is a vast project in an area where there are more wrecks per square mile than anywhere else in the world. Leigh states, "It's a case of slowly working through them, diving them one by one, photographing them, and researching their history."

Leigh became one of the very first people in Europe to use the concept of mixed gas diving to explore deep, previously unseen shipwrecks

during the very early 1990's. He moved naturally from the heavy cumbersome open circuit sets into closed circuit rebreathers when they became practical and safe for deep wreck diving. Leigh began rebreather diving in 1993, and has worked with companies in their development. Today, he uses an AP Valves Evolution unit — a unit he first dived when his friend was building it.

Although he is still a dedicated film photographer, he also uses digital equipment and has been a proficient Photoshop user since 1995. His current equipment includes the same F90x film camera and Aquatica Pro 90 housing that he has used for the last ten years, which, in his words, is bullet proof. He also uses a Canon full-frame 5D digital with, of course, Aquatica housing. The



digital housing has had extra work to rate its depth much deeper than 100m/330ft. It also incorporates the Aqua viewfinder, which comes in extremely handy when you have a large CCR mouthpiece between you and the viewfinder. His system also incorporates an underwater remote-control shutter release system developed by Aquatica for long time exposures. Both of these systems include a fisheye lens and a pair of big Sea & Sea YS350 strobes held steady by ultra light buoyancy arms.

Leigh believes that both mediums, film and digital, have a place in his field of photography. The great latitude of monochrome film cannot be matched, and gives such a sense of satisfaction when developed and placed on a light box. The final product of digital is nowhere in the same league as film, but being able to shoot hundreds of frames in a single dive is something else — as is being able to see if you have the exposure right. The downside of film is the mere 36 exposures and, of course, getting lost in the post on the way to or back from the developers! Leigh says, "The great debate of what's best will go on, but just ask the pros like North American wildlife photographer Thomas Mangelsen where their money is really made."

The photography side is just a small part of Leigh's interest in shipwrecks. Leigh has been instrumental in the diving and discovery of an estimated four hundred virgin shipwrecks around England, and his own research has led to many of these discoveries. Each year he and his team explore new wrecks, and they work closely with government depart-

ments on location. When these wrecks have been exhaustively researched and photographed, Leigh publishes their stories.

His images and shipwreck articles have been published extensively around the world for over ten years, and his photographs have appeared in books, newspapers, and on no fewer than thirty covers of diving publications. On top of this, Leigh is a regular speaker at major diving conferences around the world as well as specialist photographic seminars and workshops. His recent travels as a speaker have taken him through the USA, New Zealand, Australia, the Caribbean, and various European countries.

So what drives him and what's left for him in the future?

"Well, I've got this on-going project to photograph ocean liners as they rest on the seabed around the world, deep or shallow. Some day I want to produce a book about lost ocean liners as they were and as they are now. The hardest part of this project is getting the actual photographs; right now I've got approximately thirty to forty different liners in the bag. Liners were lost just about everywhere, and my travels have taken me to the site of the *Titanic* as well as other famous liners such as the *Lusitania* and even modern liners like the Russian *Mikhail Lermontov* off of south New Zealand. I'll probably look for a publisher at around 50 or so — that should keep me going for another few years! Liners are perhaps the best calibre of shipwreck in the world."

Leigh Bishop's *Lost Liners* presentation guides the audience through many of the liners he has dived to date. Check his website for up-coming presentations as well as more shipwreck information and expedition diving.

www.deepimage.co.uk
[email wreckdiver@mac.com](mailto:wreckdiver@mac.com)

