

- Limited Variable Ballast World Record -
105 meters/344 feet
July 15th, 2001

Photos by Gido Braase

Dear readers,



Following, you will find my account on the record I set in Egypt, July 2001. To me the story behind the record is always much more memorable than the record itself, so I wanted to share this experience with you and hope that it will be an interesting reading. Before that I would like to thank Rudi Castineyra for making this record and this rewarding experience come true one more time and my team for the great job they have done for everything to run very nice and smooth and in the most professional way. Wessam El Sebai (Diving Officer and Reserve Diver), Peter Petrov (75 meters), ArthurZaloga (90 meters), Amr Ezzat (Reserve Diver), Hisham Ayyad (60 meters), Gido Braase (Video team chef), Mutlu Gunay (Safety Officer and Cameraman), Jez Tryner (Cameraman), Jayne Mayer (Bottom Judge), Xavier Toupin (15 meters), Ahmed Hewedy (30 meters), Karim Helal Jr. (45 meters), Bob Hambidge (Surface Judge). I also would like to thank Karim Helal and Divers Lodge for welcoming me to Egypt and providing all the logistical and technical support needed, Inter Continental Hotel for our comfortable stay and Quantum Watches for all their support as my title sponsor.

Yasemin Dalkilic

The whole idea of doing a record in Egypt started long time ago. First of all, since I was very little I have always had a big interest in Egypt and its amazing history, always reading books and watching documentaries about it and wanting to visit it one day. On the other side, as every other diver, one of my biggest dreams was to dive in the famous Red Sea and see its wonderful nature. After my last record last year in July, and having done my first three records in Bodrum, Turkey, it was time to see new places, meet different people and set these records in other countries. My first goal after the variable records was to do a constant ballast record but I wanted to do it in the winter and not in traditional summer time, which is so crowded everywhere and I didn't want to wait until summer to do this record. However, the only suitable time in the Mediterranean is the summer, since at any other time the waters are too cold. Then, It made sense to try the Red Sea, which has warm waters and good weather all year long. We contacted Karim Helal, the owner of the dive center "Divers Lodge", whom Rudi has know from and worked with before. When we contacted Karim, he was very interested in such a project. During this time because of some inconveniences with the hotel in Egypt, and my school in Turkey we ended up arranging the record for July, in the middle of the summer anyway. After many e-mails discussing all the details, by November 2000, we were set to attempt the record in Egypt for July 2001.

During this time we were planning our projects for the rest of the year 2001, and decided we wanted one of them to be a record in Greece. We then realized that the constant ballast record in Greece would make more sense since the seas there are more suited for this endeavor. At the same time, with Divers Lodge being a big technical diving facility and the representatives of TDI in the Middle East, Rudi and I decided that doing a variable dive in Egypt would put their deep diving capabilities to better use. We decided to set the depth to 105 meters in the Limited Variable Ballast category and arranged all further details with Karim. He was happy with the change as well, as now they would get a chance to show their technical diving skills much better than on a "shallow" 70 meter dive.

We arrived in Egypt on July 14th after an incredibly tiring trip. Mutlu Gunay (Mutlu has worked with us in the past three records both as a cameraman and as a coordinator), Rudi and I were traveling with +300 kg of excess baggage which included my sled, rope, cables for the LIVE transmission, 4 big pelican cases full of housings and cameras and our own dive gear. It was certainly exhausting to load and unload all this stuff during all the stops until we arrived in Hurgada, but it was needed since things like the sled and even the rope must have the right dimensions, thickness, etc, and we couldn't risk not finding them in Egypt. Although technically the trip should have been short, with the delays our trip lasted about 14 hours from Istanbul to Hurgada! But it was good to see Karim, very happy and excited to have us in Egypt finally for the "New World Record" and for us to be able to rest finally. We had arrived a week earlier before our official start of the training dives so that we could arrange all the details like the arm for the sled, the mooring for the boat, the safety divers, etc. As we had enough time ahead of us, we spent the first two days doing some freediving (while Rudi was filming for our documentary) on the reefs which were really awesome. I was so amazed with the Red Sea, having seen nothing close to it in my life before and was more and more excited about the whole month of diving and training ahead of us. Then we started working on setting all the things needed for our training, like a winch for the sled system, the arm and the mooring. These things sounded very easy to do at the beginning, and Karim had arranged all the details and options for us for the dive site, but as we went on, everything became more and more difficult. We realized that the moorings they had there were not able to keep us in a deep-enough water for our dives and we needed to set up a mooring in deeper water. Let's keep in mind that our dive site which was already about 8 miles from from our dock at Intercontinental Hotel/ Divers Lodge. And as we were not able to find a tug-boat, we had to come up with a way to build a 3 ton weight and to tow it out to sea. We experimented with many things, including a rudimentary raft and then floats made out of metal drums strung together, and then combinations of both methods. The whole set of problems caused a considerable delay for the start of our training dives and everyday Karim, all the divers in our safety team, and especially us, were getting more and more anxious to start diving. During this time, we finished the "Safety Diver" course, which is a requirement of F.R.E.E. (the verification organization for my records). This course is basically a rescue course for all the divers (safety divers and the cameramen) that will be in the water during the record and the record training, to teach them how to deal with all kinds of emergency situations underwater. The course consists of a theoretical section where the instructor (Rudi in our case) describes all the emergency scenarios and how to deal with them and underwater part where Rudi and I simulated all the scenarios with each and every one of the divers and tested them on their reactions. Although all of them were excellent divers, it was very good and needed to go through all these procedures to ensure a truly professional operation with optimum safety during all my dives.



After almost two weeks of work, it was July 27th when we were finally able to start our training dives. During that time we had gone through a lot, including a failed attempt at setting the first mooring, which disappeared before our eyes into 900 + meters of water after we dropped it in what we thought was considerably shallower water. So we went at it again and finally succeeded, and I feel now that this time of frustrations was good for all of us, as it brought us together as a team in a very strong way. The first day was used to test the sled and other systems and to show the safety divers how the whole operation evolved by doing two dives to 45 meters. Everything went very nice and smooth, the whole system worked perfectly and I had missed diving so much that I had a lot of fun with those shallow dives. I could see the same enjoyment in Rudi's eyes after so much work to prepare this whole thing and the stress we both went through during the last weeks. The divers were also impressed with the dives and were all looking forward to starting the actual training. The next day was the first day of our real training. The first dive was set to 60 meters. The same way it was for all the past records, the depths of each were planned from months

ago, when Rudi was designing the whole training program before getting to Egypt. Because of the delay we had at the start, we needed to make some changes and adjustments to the whole training program, but still we looked on target for the attempt on July 15th even with a lesser number of training dives. Each one of our training days consists of one deep dive and they get deeper as we approach the record date. We go to the dive site, the divers and the boat crew set the sled and their gear, the deco and descent lines, etc. In the mean time I do my long stretching and breathing session on the boat. Our friend Mutlu Gunay, who is the only one allowed to perform these duties, checks the whole system, like the sled release shackle, the line depth, the brake, shortly: the whole mechanical set up. Then Bob Hambidge, our diving officer checks with all the divers their depth, dive plan and the preplanned signals. Gido Braase, our man in charge of the photo and video teams, works on placing all the cameras on their positions, from bottom to sled, and checks with the camera crew their stations and their equipment. When everything is ready Rudi and I go to the platform on the back of the boat and start our preparation for that day's dive. I do two negative pressure dives to 15 and 18 meters respectively, keeping the dive times around 1:15 minutes so that I stay fresh and rested. After this the divers get in the water and I am ready to get on the sled and start the 7-minute countdown, where I do the final breathing before the deep dive. During this time Rudi rechecks the divers, system, etc. and makes sure once more that everything is right. We go through this ritual every dive day.



But today, we had a problem. We were at the dive site at about 11:00 in the morning, but saw that there was a very strong current. We put the line in the water with 80kg of weight, plus a camera at the bottom with a big arm and with the weight of the rope itself, which is another 50 kg and still our line was curving at an unacceptable angle. Rudi checked it and said that it was gonna be impossible to dive with these conditions. As I was both physically and mentally ready for the dive and so much looking forward to do it, I didn't wanna believe it and thought that maybe Rudi was exaggerating a bit and wanted to see it myself as well. When I jumped in the water I was immediately blown away by the current and was taken away from the boat at least 20-30 meters in a few seconds. It was almost impossible even to hang on to the drift line. So we decided to go to the shore, by the side of the nearby island and wait until the current died down with the upcoming slack-high tide. But we had 60 meters of rope with a lot of weight to be pulled up and didn't have any winch to do that. All the boats in the Red Sea have a system where they don't use anchors not to destroy the reef and use the moorings that are set on the dive sites already, therefore none of the boats have a winch. So the whole crew on the boat worked very hard to pull the rope up but as we saw how hard this was, we were worried about the upcoming dive days, how would we be able to pull the line out of the water everyday. While we waited, we conducted more rescue drills with the safety team as we were really anxious to do something in the water, whatever it was. None of them missed a step, they were ready to assist me should I ever need it. At about 4:30 in the afternoon we were ready to go back to our buoy out in the sea. Although the current was still there, it had died down a bit and it was now acceptable, although "acceptable" is a relative term when it comes to a deep dive where you need everything to be perfect. We set up our system, went through our ritual, then for the last 7 minutes of preparation the divers assumed their positions and with my signal the dive started. After months of not diving and a year of not being on the sled, I was a bit worried about the equalization, not knowing how my ears would behave. But throughout the whole dive, I was comfortably able to pop my ears and had no problem at all. I got a tag from the bottom diver which was quite delayed that day, since it was the first time our bottom diver did this job, then I completed my ascent, enjoying it tremendously. The only problem was the current, especially since it was a new experience for me, as I never freedove with such current before. On the ascent, I was constantly being pushed to the line and was unable to do my pulls comfortably, so I turned to the other side of the line, but then I had to spend some effort to stay on the line! Basically, I was using my arms to stay on the line and only my dolphin kicks to move me upwards. But everything was working perfect, and I was feeling very good myself. We went through the dive with Rudi at the surface, I explained how it went exactly and obviously he was also very happy to see that in this first day of diving our system was working very well, the divers were all great, and that I was feeling very comfortable which is what we were counting on of course. We gave a day of rest, so that

both Rudi and I and the team could release the stress we accumulated during the many days of waiting.

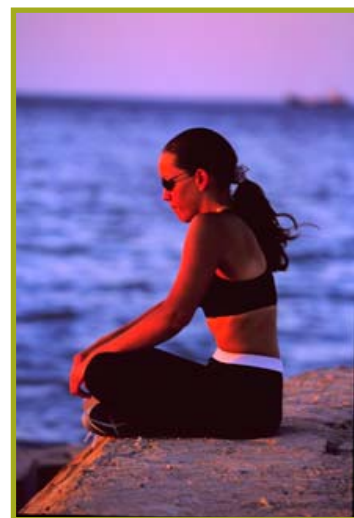


The next dive on the 30th was gonna be to 70 meters. Because of our experience the previous dive with the current, we decided to do the dive in the afternoon again, which was the time at which it would be milder. This was quite strange and even bad for me, since I've always done my deep dives in the morning which is my best time, but that's the way it had to happen. I ate a light lunch at noon time, and we all went out to sea. When we arrived at the dive site, again we saw that the current was too strong. The problem also was that, the moon was filling up and as this happens, the current during the day was lasting longer and longer causing more delay for us to start our dives. So

we again waited for a few hours on the dive site until the angle on the line became acceptable and as soon as it did, all of us quickly got ready to start the dive. I did my two negative pressure dives to 15 and 18 meters, which now also served to check the strength of the current at those depths besides getting me ready. The divers got in the water, gave me a big "Go Yas" shout and then went down to their positions. I started my dive and like before, because of the strong current in the first 15 meters, the sled was moving very slow. There was an arch on the line and it took me about 18 seconds to pass this first part, which is a speed I can surpass even with fins. Then after the first 15-20 meters, the current started to disappear and I was speeding up quite rapidly. I reached 70 meters again with no equalization problem while in the last 3-5 meters, as usual not being able to pop my ears but with no pain and no problem (on the sled dives I usually can pop my ears down to about 60 meters and after that I need to use diaphragm contractions to be able to equalize, which does not make my ears pop but it's enough not to get an unresistable pain). On the ascent, this time the current was a bit too strong, making it hard for me to stay on the line and causing a lot of inefficiency, but since it was not a deep dive yet, I didn't feel tired throughout the dive. After the dive, we did our usual debriefing with the team, in which Bob and Rudi and myself go through the whole dive. All the good and bad things that were done by everybody are reviewed, so that we can improve them for the next dives and I let them know about the signals I got or didn't get and discuss how to make them louder next time. I mentioned again that the tag retrieval at the bottom took too long and that on deeper dives I couldn't afford to loose so much time at the bottom. But the team was really great and as we made more dives they kept constantly improving themselves. On the way back we had a chance to admire the sunset over the line between sea and desert and realized, yet again, what a beautiful place the Red Sea is. We also noticed that we were coming back later every time.

When we got to the hotel, Rudi and I downloaded both my Suunto computer and my Quantum watch to check the stats from the dive. We realized that the delay on the first 15-20 meters of the descent, thanks again to the current, was adding too many seconds to my dive time so we decided to make the sled even heavier and then brake even more carefully after 60 meters to counter-act the extra weight. And the ascent was working out fine but a little more speed was going to make the dive times even better.

The next day's dive was to 80 meters. Since we had to wait a lot yesterday for the current to die down, today we decided to leave even later, at about 3 o'clock. But again at the dive site, the current was too strong and we had to wait for a couple of hours to start. During this time everybody would be staring at the line in the water and waiting for the perfect time to jump in. The current picked up again about an hour after it had slowed down, so we had a very small window and couldn't afford to wait until it got "perfect" or we



would miss our window. If we started diving when the current was at its lowest, then by the end of our dive the divers would be decompressing in too strong a drift, so we had to start as soon as it got a bit better so that our whole dive would be under acceptable conditions. So this time we started our dive at about 6:00 in the afternoon, the sea was mostly calm so that was not a problem, but the ever-present current was always a concern. I got in the water, did the negative pressure dives, which on the ascent as I left the line I would be almost 25 meters away from the boat by the time I surfaced. But again I was feeling good and ready. Rudi, as usual was constantly checking the water, the current, checking how I feel, checking my breathing to see how it looks, helping me fix any mistakes if there were any, together with Bob directing the safety team on what to do, when to get in and when to go down, etc. Then on the final part of my breathing, he would keep the sled in the direction that I was most comfortable with relative to the angle on the line, check the sled camera and lights and let me know as soon as the OK signal from the safety divers was relayed to the surface, while still keeping track of the countdown and making sure that the sled would be released as soon as I gave the signal. I realized once again what a unique role he plays in this whole thing, which goes far beyond being my trainer and how important it is to have somebody like him, who can be aware of all aspects of the operation. Again, I started the dive with a very slow first 15 meters then sped up more and more as I went down. By the time I got the signal at 60 meters I turned the brake wheel, but since the brake pad was too far from the line I realized that what I did did not help the sled slow down. But I was not sure about this and didn't want to repeat the mistake I made last year, where once during a deep dive I braked too much and the sled stopped and I did not realize it for a few seconds thinking that I was only going very slow.



That time, after a lot of shouting from the safety divers I realized that the sled was not moving and opened the brake to let it go which caused my dive to be much longer than we expected and making the people at the surface very worried. So I kept going down fast and started having problems equalizing. I was using the diaphragm contractions after only 65-70 meters, moving my neck sideways to stretch my eustachian tubes but the pain was increasing very rapidly, becoming almost unbearable. But then I was already at 80 meters, so I got the tag and started my ascent. Again, despite the current, the dive was being easy. When I talked about this dive with Rudi yesterday, we had decided that I should keep a normal pace from the bottom to 60 meters, then speed up a bit between 60 and 20, and take it easy again from 20 to the surface. I was paying attention to my technique and my speed. The dive ended successfully again, the dive time was exactly how we planned it to be, and I had a lot more in me left, strength and air wise. But I was very worried about my ears because of the premature pain I got at depth. Last year, when I was doing my first deep dives on the sled, I was coming up with a bad face telling Rudi that my ears were hurting and did not feel like in good enough shape to go much deeper than that. Then we started to practice the diaphragm contractions outside the water so I could learn this technique which, according to Rudi, would help me equalize in deep water after the regular valsalva was no longer efficient. I could never pop my ears on land with a diaphragm contraction while Rudi easily could do it, but then once at depth I was able to equalize and it definitely worked. So anyway, Rudi was used to this bad face I had after a deep dive complaining about equalization, and was telling me that all we had to do was to slow down the sled a bit and try to pack more air. Although what he said was right, and it had worked for all my previous dives, at the same time as I knew that the pain I got on this dive was much stronger than any other pain before. I was still quite worried.



After one day of rest, we had two dives on consecutive days to 85 and 90 meters planned. On the boat, I did an even longer breathing session than usual so that I could stretch all the muscles around the lungs and get them ready for a better and bigger final breath. This time we put a bit less weight on the sled, and checked the brake to use it after 60 meters to slow me down. When we downloaded my last dive, we saw for a fact that after 60 meters the brake was not working and the sled was only speeding up. But every time it always took me a few dives to get used to the brake and

get it working right. We started the dive at about 6:30, today the current was much less than all other times which made us all up happy and made everything much easier for us. The team got to their positions, relayed an OK signal to the surface confirming that everything was OK at depth, I got my few final breaths and then got the last big one with three packs in the end and started my descent. I could feel that the first 15 meters were not that slow this time, the sled was picking up speed even that shallow. A little bit after I got my signal at 40 meters I put my hand on the brake wheel to be ready and at 60 turned it three times which again felt like it didn't help much. The equalization started becoming very hard, very very painful very rapidly and when I was at about 75 meters I felt my right ear rupturing with a loud whistle. The water rushed in at that moment and the descent line and the sled started falling and turning to the right. I was trying to be very calm and deal with this problem in the best possible way. At this point I hit the knot at 85, the bottom diver Jayne quickly gave me the tag. After the dive when we looked at the video I saw that instead of putting my right hand forward to get the tag as I always do, I was extending my left hand to the upper left corner. I was completely disoriented and with everything spinning around me I was thinking what to do next, whether I should get air and assistance from Jayne or start the ascent. In just moments I was telling myself that if I take air from Jayne, the long ascent time that I'm gonna have will cause my ear problem to be even worse and it was gonna be very hard to spend that time with the terrible pain I had. The other option was to pull myself up the line, so if I followed the line carefully, the spinning should not be much of a problem and I would get assistance when if needed from a shallower safety diver. At that moment I heard Jayne shouting "Go Yas, Go Yas" very loud, so I thought that she probably was shouting because I spent too much time at the bottom and right away I started my ascent. It was being hard to catch the line every time I moved my hand up because the line was falling to the right constantly, but I was keeping my whole body in contact with the line and never lost it completely. I completed my ascent already thinking "What's gonna happen next? What will happen to the record" or "Will I be able to continue freediving?" I had never ruptured an ear drum and didn't know what this would lead to. I managed to complete my ascent without getting any assistance, but still at the surface had an enormous amount of pain. Rudi was happy to see me finishing the dive very strong but he could right away see the big concern in my eyes. He thought that as usual I had pain at depth and was worried about the upcoming dives. But I started explaining what has happened and that for sure I ruptured my ear drum. Still it was only when I tried to equalize and Rudi could hear the hissing sound it made from meters away, that he finally was sure the ear drum had ruptured. I was so sad, since I had no idea what this problem would mean for the future. Whether I would be able to do the record or not, or even be able to freedive at all as I have heard about cases where after rupturing the ear drum the divers were never as good as before. But the most important thing was to be patient until we saw the doctor and learn how bad it was. Rudi's biggest worry was to get the ear infected because of the water going in and we needed to keep the ear healthy and clean for two more weeks until the record, of course if we were going to be able to do the record. Having ruptured an ear-drum before, Rudi knew that equalization was possible as long as an infection didn't develop.



As soon as we came back to the dock, Karim was waiting for us to take me to the doctor. At the navy base, the doctor looked at my ear and told me that I had a bad ear infection and fungus in both ears, that the drums were very weak and that's why I had ruptured it so easily. He told me that the hole was very little but that there were many little cracks on the drum which were opening under big pressure and would continue to do so. He also said that I needed 3 more days of rest before even thinking of getting in the water again, although he would prefer if I spent the next two weeks dry, which would have destroyed our plans obviously. These few days were very stressing for all of us. We didn't know how the ear was gonna behave on the next dive and we were all worried about the record very much. We did some good careful land training during this time and some static apnea exercises in the pool, using ear plugs and two hoods not to get my ears wet. We went for a second check to the doctor three days later and he told me that although there was an improvement the ear drum was still

not good enough and I needed two more days of rest. This wait was a slow torture for all of us, and while waiting, we heard about another doctor who specialized in ears and who had a great reputation among divers. We went to see him and, although he turned out to be of great help, the initial outcome of this visit was that he demanded that we wait yet another day before getting in the water. At that point, Rudi and I decided that we would dive on Sunday regardless, for we needed to see what I could really do in this condition and decide whether to cancel the record or not. In the meantime, I could feel my shape slip away with each of those days spent on land.



Finally on Sunday, six days after the incident, we were set to dive to 80 meters. I was very worried before the dive, because of the big pain I went through last time I dove and the constant pain that went on since that time until today, even with all the medications taken. The vertigo that was going to be caused by the flow of cold water into my ears the same way it happened last time also had me extremely worried as it is obviously easy to see that doing a deep dive under those conditions is far from ideal. And finally and most importantly, I dreaded this dive so much because if things didn't go well enough, I had to forget about the world record that I worked and dreamed so much for. I was also feeling weak because of the antibiotics and injections I had to use for the ear infection and the loss of shape because of lack of proper training during all this time. When we got to the dive site, we again saw that the current was very strong, we waited for quite a long time for it to die down but still it was never good enough. I did my

warm-up negative pressure dives and after testing the current, both Rudi and I agreed that it was one of the worst days we had had. This was going to be an added stress for me, at a time when I definitely did not need any more of it. Then we decided to pull up the line 10 meters and do the dive to 70 meters, which is a depth that I'm very comfortable with in any situation.

I started doing the negative pressure dives and after 6 days, the moment I started going down the air was flowing constantly out of my ear every time I equalized and it was hurting a lot because of the salt water going in. While Guido was filming me at my stop for this dive, I was showing him the bubbles coming out of my ear, which both managed to amaze me and piss me off very badly. We were ready to start the actual dive. Everybody was a bit nervous but, like every other day, they were all well set up, ready to take their positions and follow the tasks they needed to do. We finished the 7 minute countdown and started the dive. Diving was very good with the ruptured ear, since I didn't need to equalize it, but it was being a big problem for the other one.



Because the air was flowing through the damaged ear, it was being even harder to pop the other ear and to direct more air to it. I was moving my neck to the side to keep the good ear at a higher position to equalize it better. At around 30 meters, the sled started spinning around the line very fast, then I realized that it is not the sled spinning (Rudi would remind me proudly that his sleds don't spin) of course, but it is how I felt because of the disorientation caused by the rupture. This was making things very weird, since I didn't know with so much spinning if I was going to be able to keep this under control when I got to the bottom. It took again about 7 seconds for me to get the tag from the bottom diver, since the sled usually turns a bit and it is hard for the bottom divers to position themselves right in front of me at the right level and they always have to swim towards me and this always took too much time. I got the tag, put it on my arm and started the ascent. Still everything was turning around me and I was realizing that throughout my ascent I was turning around the line while kicking and pulling myself up. I was hearing the loud whistles in my ear, but I was happy in the end that the dive could be done like this. Rudi met me at 15 meters as usual, looking relieved to have

me back, and when we got to the surface I was as happy as if I had just done the record. I told Rudi that I'm sure that the record can be done and we can proceed with the trainings without a doubt. The problem was bad and very discomforting, but I could keep it under control, which was really good.

The next dive was planned to 85 meters. I was feeling very tired from the dive on the previous day which I did feeling very weak already. We did some studies with Rudi at night on the speed of the dive. We needed the descent to be slower so that I could equalize the other ear, and therefore the ascent to be a bit faster to keep the total dive time as short as possible. We were deciding on the set up for this dive, like the weight on the sled, the braking points, the ascent speed (which parts to speed up, which ones to slow down). We put even more weight on the line, up to 100 kilos from 80, to keep it straight against the current and after a good long briefing by Bob, Rudi and myself before the dive, we were all set to go. The dive was successful but this time I was losing even more air from my ear. It started becoming a bit hard to equalize the good ear towards the 85 meter mark but definitely much easier than before because I had already gotten rid of the infection. There probably was a bit less spinning compared to the last dive, but also every time I dove I was learning more and more how to deal with this and keep this situation under control. The only problem was that on the way up, I got very tired. I was feeling that with every kick and the pull, I was collecting a lot of lactic acid, and in the last 30 meters I was at the end of my strength. Constantly talking to myself, using my muscles in the most efficient way, I managed to reach the surface. I was feeling that the air was not a problem at all, but I was very, very tired which is what we were afraid of because of the many training days we had lost and the antibiotics, that always weaken me a lot. We went to see the doctor after this dive and what he said sounded a bit worrying. He said that the hole had grown in size a lot and that I'm reaching the point where I might need an operation to repair this rupture. He said that he would try his best medications, which normally should work well if I stayed dry, but would probably have no effect if I continued diving. In the following week we were planning on doing 4 dives before the record, but after what the doctor said we decided to do only one more dive to 95 meters and then the record dive, depending on how I felt with the 95 meter dive. We took three days of rest, and this helped a lot with the recovery of my muscles. Also, we decided to eliminate the antibiotics completely, since they were weakening me tremendously and there was still no infection. During the three days that we waited, I never equalized my ear, to see if the hole is still there or not, as I usually did before. I was using all the drops and medicines the doctor gave me and was being extremely careful with it.



Thursday was the big day. The 95 meter dive was going to tell us exactly where we stood and let us decide if we are going to be able to do the record on Sunday. Towards the end of last year, FREE had made a change in the record rules, that it was not mandatory for the freediver to get a tag for the variable ballast records. That's because in the variable dives, there is a knot to stop the sled and the bottom judge witnesses that the sled goes all the way to the knot. Until this time we had preferred to do the tag retrieval since it has never been an extra job for me. But this time, on every dive the tag retrieval was causing a loss of 7-8 seconds at the bottom, which multiplied by my average ascent speed of 1.27 meters/second, means that I would be already 10 meters off the bottom by then if I didn't have to get the tag. And since I was facing a bad vertigo on every dive, plus the added dive time that came with the slower descent, plus the extra strength needed to ascend with the strong current, this extra time at the bottom was becoming more of a problem. So we decided not to use the tags for this dive for the first time. Everything was set like the

record day. The judges were on the site, ready to perform their duties and keeping track of everything, and the emergency speed boat and medics were ready and in position. All our sponsors and VIP's were there as well. I was going through different feelings, because I was worried that this could be my last dive day in Egypt. The ear did not worry me too much since I already knew how to deal with the vertigo, but I was worried that if I got tired the same way I did on the 85 meter dive, that could be a reason to completely forget about the record. And at the same time I was ready to use all the strength I had to finish this dive successfully. Everybody in the team was supporting me a lot, and this was very nice but at least one person except me was feeling the same exact way I did, sharing exactly what I was going through and this made things much easier for me. Rudi's encouraging words before the dive was the only thing that could help me and that I could make a big

use of. Today was a very hot day, so the preparations before my dives were being a bit hard, since I was getting too hot and this was causing my pulse to go up. Rudi was pouring cold water on me constantly. I got on the sled, got the big "Go Yas!" from the team and did my last few minutes of breathing. During this time I felt my pulse going higher and higher. That was mainly because of the extreme heat outside with the direct sun on me resulting in a pulse of like 120 on the surface. I was telling Rudi about this, worried, but he was calmly reminding me that it would go down to the usual values as soon as I start the dive, which is what happened. But this caused in a delay for my start since I just couldn't feel ready to take my final breath and start the dive. At about +1:30 after the zero mark, following a long inhalation lasting as usual around 30 seconds and then with 3 long packs in the end, I gave the sign to release the sled. After the first 10-15 meters I was already in the dive mode, with a rapidly decreasing heartrate. But the strangest thing was that I was equalizing both ears and there was no water or air flow in the damaged ear. Everytime I equalized my ears I was so worried that the rupture would open up, but it just didn't. I again missed most of the signals or heard them so weak that I wasn't sure which one it was, but I always can feel exactly where I am so I was just following the light and the pressure changes and feeling the depths. I got the signal at 60 meters and I slowed down the sled and made my descent after that much slower so that I wouldn't go through too much trouble with the ear. I was almost sure that at some point the hole would open up, so I was doing my diaphragm contractions for equalization and this was working well as always. Then I reached the 95 meter mark. Forgetting about the fact that today I was not gonna receive a tag, I put my arm forward for a second then realized my mistake and started my ascent right away. I was, as before, a bit narked as well. I was feeling a big knot on my throat and everything around me was wavy. But this is nothing new, that's exactly how it happens everytime I go below 90 meters or so on the sled. I started the ascent being extra careful with every single kick or pull. I had to make them extremely efficient and I had to watch my body very carefully and balance my dolphin kicks or pulls according to how tired my arms or legs get. But I was feeling very strong, very comfortable, still I was remembering the physically tough dive to 85 that I did 3 days ago, so I wasn't speeding up much and constantly talking to myself, asking myself questions like how are my arms, my legs, how do I feel, what can I do to make this better. This is something Rudi had always reminded me to do before every dive, and I knew it was very important, but somehow, I could never manage to talk to myself during a dive before. But this dive was very important for me to realize this record that I've worked and even suffered so much for. And today I finally manage to talk to myself and I was feeling very strong. My muscles were getting tired but they were in good enough shape to go for many more meters than I had to today, and my air was very good. I met Rudi at 15 meters and could see the excitement in his eyes, he was wondering how the dive went but was also happy seeing that I was good and strong, I gave him a big ok and when I got the surface I had a happiness more than any of the record dives that I had done before. Because this dive definitely meant that I was gonna do the record with no problem on Sunday, and there was a much bigger happiness than all other record dives because this time we really went through so much stress and problems and the record had been under risk too much. And the fact that the hole didn't open up in my ear was very surprising. Both Rudi and I were so happy, even before breathing and resting properly I was telling Rudi how the whole dive went and how comfortable I was feeling and he was so relieved at that moment. Finally we had done a dive wich was so much fun and joy, and that was really rewarding. Then right away the doctor on the boat checked my ear. He told me that he can see the part that I had the hole very clearly but it was covered with a thin skin. He also said that there was no infection left in my ear and the drum was looking much healthier than it was before. GREAT!!!!!!! Then I went into the water again, to meet with all the divers and talk about the dive during their decompression. I could see everybody very happy that the dive was so good. Now we could all relax during our last three days and do one last dive with no worries and a lot of fun. I would have preferred to do another 2-3 dives during that time of course, but Rudi and I decided that the most important thing was to keep the ear healthy and stay dry for those last 3 days, knowing that I had the record in me anyway.



The last days were hectic as usual. The crew from Turkey to do the LIVE transmission had just arrived, but for the LIVE broadcast they needed some permissions from Egypt, so everybody was

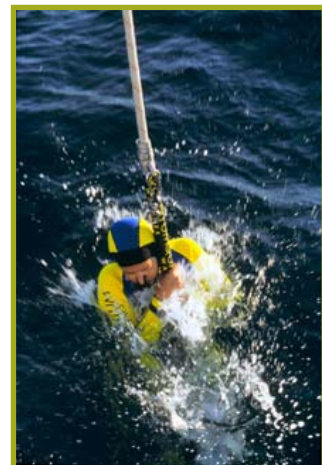
working very hard on getting them quickly. They were supposed to be here a week before but because of a canceled charter flight and then not being able to find space on any plane for all 15 of them and their 1,6 tons of equipment they made it there only two days before the record. With a quick intensive work they got their set up ready and on Saturday went to the site to do a test with all our cameras. They came back all tired and frustrated in the afternoon finding out that the frequency that Egyptian government had given to them was occupied by a channel from Lebanon, and in one day there was nothing they could do to solve this. But at this point we needed to think quick and move forward, so we arranged everything to be able to do a quick edit with a piece from all the cameras in the water, as soon as I came out after the record, and this was going to be sent to the satellite in a maximum 30 minutes after the dive. We also had a team from BBC that had arrived on location to record a section of their documentary "Extreme Environments" for TLC and Discovery Channel, and we were afraid that it could be an added stress, but they were all the time so nice, understanding and professional that they were actually of much help to us. Gido and Mutlu were taking care of all the things needed by the TV crew from Turkey, and they had the experience from last year, so we could just relax and get ready comfortably for our last dive. Which is the way it should be but had never happened before.



Then we were on the boat for the final day. We left around 1 in the afternoon, ate while on the way, got there, got things set and started our usual waiting for the current to die down. Our boat was so crowded, but there wasn't anybody that didn't necessarily have to be there. The boat crew, safety divers, a few guys from the TV crew and cameraman, all five of the BBC team which made a total of about 40 people on the boat. But they always were extremely careful providing us the space and silence for Rudi and I to go through the warm-up and breathing on the boat. Just as I was finishing my breathing they told us that the current is looking better and that we should hurry up and get in

the water. I started with the facial immersion, relaxing, thinking about the dive and trying to cool of a bit from the extremely hot weather there. Then I started the negative pressure dives. I did my 5 minute prep and dove to 15 meters and waited there as I always do. I was feeling good and still I didn't have any problems with my ear. Then did another 5 minute prep and started my second negative pressure to 18 meters. When I was waiting at 18 meters I was surprised how comfortable I was feeling today. I didn't have any contractions whereas I have about 3-4 everytime, it felt a bit strange. Then I got to the surface feeling good and happy that I'm in such good shape today, then I told Rudi that the neg pressure dive felt so strangely good this time. Smiling, he told me that I didn't exhale before I went down and that he thought that I would exhale when I was at the bottom, but I didn't. First I didn't believe that, but then remembered that I never exhaled. What a foolish thing that was, we were gonna do another negative pressure dive but the divers were already getting in the water with all their trimix equipment so we didn't want to stop the flow of the whole thing and decided to go down anyway. I knew I could do the dive like this, but would have felt much more comfortable and in the dive "mode" if I had done both negative pressure dives.

Finally 7 minutes again, I'm doing my usual breathing, everything is going right so far. And about 1 minute after the 0 I started the dive. Although last time my ear didn't have problems, I was still concerned about that since the membrane was still not completely healed and it was very thin. So I was thinking about my equalization and my speed during the descent most of the time. As it happened many many other times before, I again didn't hear some of the signals, so the first one I heard was at 60 and then I braked right away, but it didn't slow me down as much as I wanted. I started going through some pain again in my ear, although it was much better than the time it ruptured tough. I was carefully doing my diaphragm contractions, moving my head around to stretch the eustachian tubes, and around 85 meters I



felt a tiny whistle in my left ear (the good one) and the sled started spinning again (not that it did, but again as a result of another rupture). I think that very little amount of air passed through this time because the disorientation was less than the other time, or maybe simply I was getting used to it. Then after 90-95 meters, as it always happens, I started feeling a kind of squeezing in my inner ear and in my sinuses. After this point the pain in the ears almost stops. I feel this strong inner pressure in the sinuses but it is not painful at all, so I don't need to equalize. This is the best part of the dive. But at the same time the effect of narcosis is increasing and it is making the spinning that I go through because of my ear much worse. I feel the wavy images and sounds around me but it is not too strong so everything is under control. Again the liquid that I feel like a knot on my throat is bothering me a lot but I know that it will disappear in a little time. I reached the 105 meter mark as the sled came to a sudden stop, and started my ascent right away. Again being extremely careful with my technique and all the time talking to myself. On the way up again I didn't hear most of the signals, we definitely need to make this sound better for next time, but that is also because of the loud whistling in my left ear. As I passed the 50-60 meters, this time I was feeling tired. Again the head was clear but I could feel my muscles full of lactic acid not being able to function as good as they did in the 95 meter dive. I was making the pulls and kicks softer not to tire the muscles that much and as my air was going to be fine I wasn't too worried about a slight increase in the plans we made for the dive time. Getting close to the surface, with every pull I could feel my muscles getting more and more loaded very rapidly. At around 25 meters I left the line and went on with a few regular kicks. This change helped me, then after a few more pulls and dolphin kicks again, when I got the 15 meter signal I left the line, kicked for a while and let the buoyancy help me. I met Rudi at this stage and gave him a big ok with my head letting him know that everything was ok. And I got to the surface with a big happiness again. I was very clear but definitely tired. I gave the judge a big OK and here we have another record. It felt like a miracle that after all this stress and problems, especially with my ear and losing the shape because of not being able to train properly, it was really rewarding that we managed to do this record.