

Location	Elephant Cave and Environs
Location	Elephant Cave, Crete, Greece
Date(s)	July 24 2017 (Monday)
Partner(s)	Kyle Finnegan
Total Number of Divers	11 divers on the boat
Trip Duration	8.50am hotel pick-up and 4.30pm hotel drop-off
Gear Notes	AquaLung Libra BCD, Mares Abyss 22 regulator set, Orange Apollo Bio-Pro fins with booties, Mares X-Vision Mask, Patagonia long sleeved neoprene Spring Jane jacket, Steel 80 tanks and 4lbs of weight (placed integrated pockets), Olympus Tough TG-4 Camera
Dive Operator	Paradise Dive Center
Accommodations	Aquilo Porto in Rethymnon
Tourist Attractions	N/A
Motto for the day	"Please try to instill a little confidence in me!"

Dive 1	
Site Name	Outside of Elephant Cave aka 'Environs'
Individuals Stats	Linsey Warren
GPS Coordinates	35°28'10.13"N; 24°14'40.48"E (approx.)
Dive Master	Angelus and Stellus
Max Depth	79ft/ 24.1m
Bottom Time	39 minutes
Start PSI	2,836 PSI
End PSI	874 PSI
Visibility	Good (est. 35-40ft)
Conditions (Current etc.)	Calm
Water Temperature	Max. 81F/ 27.2C Min. 69F/ 20.6C
Outside Temperature	Max. 96F / 36C (Rethymnon)
Surface Interval	First Dive – no interval before
Notes	Thermocline was at around 50ft (noticeable temperature drop there).

The Story

Well! With an unclear number of dives planned, Kyle somehow managed to commandeer most of our luggage space! Good thing Thomson Holidays gives you an extra allotment of weight if you can show your diving certification. Good find on Kyle's part because we were definitely a bit overweight on the checked dive bag! Our other check bag had our clothes, and I had a carry-on with some clothes and swim suits (the "in case" bag) and the remaining carry-on was the very heavy bag of electronics. It was definitely stopped at security and Kyle had to unpack it and show the security person what was inside. The poor guy... even I looked at some of the items and thought they looked suspicious! Lucky for us though, he was very nice.

We booked our scuba days for Monday and Wednesday as that worked best with the other available tours and attractions we wanted to see. Monday rolled around and at 8.50am we were out-front of the Aquilo Porto hotel and picked up by a member of the Paradise Dive staff. It was about a fifteen-minute drive over to Paradise Dive Center located a little west of Rethymnon. The building itself was quite nice and overall clean. We arrived and there were already people sitting at the benches near the outdoor pool filling out the liability release forms. The majority of the people seemed to be taking the PADI Discover Scuba or Open Water certification. My initial thought was that it'd be a really small group of divers going out on the boat. *Sweet!!* Except, that is not how it happened. Slowly, more people arrived until we had nine divers and two staff dive masters. Kyle asked where we were going and, of course, it was a cave. *Lord. Why is it always the dives that scare me that get picked?* I was nervous so we asked if they had a map to show us and fortunately Stellus was able to show us a diagram and explain the general dive plan. In my experience and mind, there really wasn't much point in fighting it.

Outside, we started getting our gear laid out. Everyone around us was donning full neoprene dive suits with hoodies. *Okay?* I asked about the water temperature. I estimated that the temperature was on the cusp. The dive crew suggested I should wear a full suit. Went into the gear room with one gent and he pulled off a suit and gave it to me. I felt it and immediately scoffed. I started to put it on and laughingly asked him how thick it was? *Geez!!!* It was practically a cold-water suit! He told me it was 5mm. *It was a cold-water suit!* I was sweating just getting it on. And I kept laughing and asking him 'seriously?'. I went out and briefly talked about it with Kyle. It seemed extreme for the circumstances and I really didn't want to feel so claustrophobically restrained all day. I informed the staff I'd bring it along in case but I was planning on just wearing my Patagonia zip jacket unless the water proved to be too cold.

With that concluded we started to load our gear onto the little boat. Honestly, I wasn't sure we could get eleven on the boat, not to mention one of the diver's cameras which weighed 40kg and was easily the size of a small child! For certain, there was barely sitting space for half of that and the tanks were covering almost all the additional floor space. I can't say I was overly thrilled about the situation, but I was willing to roll with it to start. That was, until we pulled away from the dock and started to head out to the location. We started to pick up speed and the boat rocked up so the front was at an almost uncomfortably high angle. Most of us were at the front. Thank goodness. But it still felt unstable. Angelus was steering and he started to pick up speed, then stopped the boat. Then started this process again. Then again. During these short interludes of movement, the boat felt like it was quite unbalanced and one of the air tanks (not strapped down, just stacked near the front) slid out of place so I was holding it down with a foot. It was making me quite nervous. Finally, they said we had to go back because there wasn't enough fuel. *Hmm. Not a good sign. Shouldn't that be something that was checked beforehand?* We returned, and grabbed two large plastic containers of fuel. Again, not comfortable with having two giant plastic bins of fuel sitting on a boat in the hot and direct sun. *The boat already felt dangerous, now we were putting on two bombs!?* *Great.* I asked if we were going to split up into two boats and redistribute the weight and was ignored all three times I asked. Well, that answers that. At least our fuel bombs were put in a compartment of the boat away from direct sunlight. I mentioned to one of the other passengers that it felt a bit dangerous and the German guy half laughed and had a kind of 'Hunh, you think so?'. *Ain't gettin' no support from the Euros I guess!*

At this point, resigned to the fact that it was either get off and not dive or just embrace the moment I leaned over to Kyle and told him the motto for the day was 'Please try to instill a little confidence in me' because up to this moment I wasn't feeling overly confident in the dive staff or situation. *Here's to*

hoping it gets better! Fortunately, we made it to the cove without incident. It was one of those moments where you ask, in an alternate universe, did it went as well for the other iterations of yourself!?

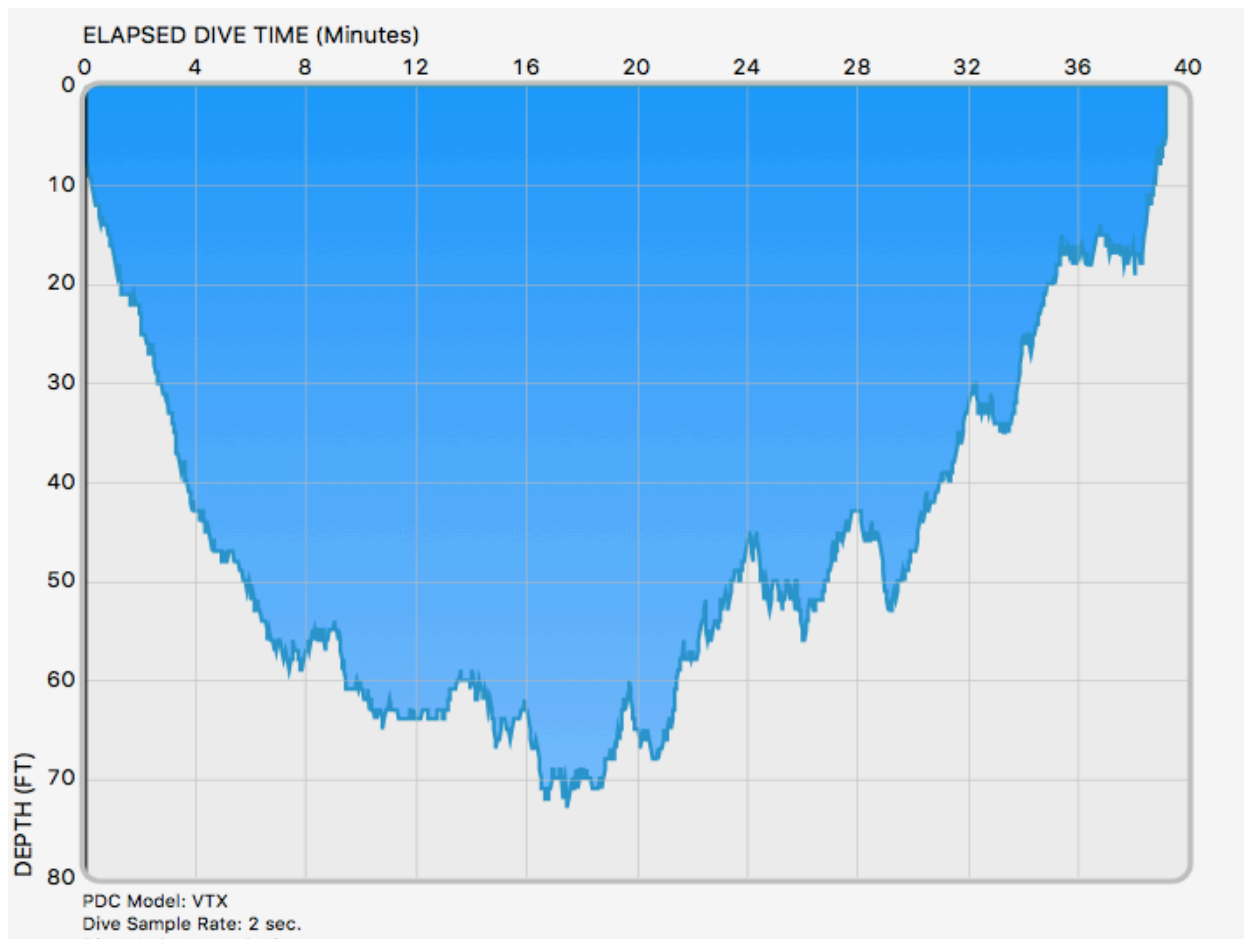


The small cove we pulled into was gorgeous. I freely admit the water off the coast of Crete is gorgeous. I don't know if I saw an area where the water wasn't clear and turquoise. It was stunning. Given that it was a small boat and not a lot of room for actually moving it took a while to get everyone geared up and off the boat. We were told we could roll off the side, gear up in the water or do a giant stride. It looked quite high sided so I opted for giant stride. Once we were all in we split off into our two groups and began to descend.

At about 50-55ft the water had that haze to it. *Incoming! Thermocline!* Sure enough, that was where the water temperature dropped noticeably for me. Bracing. But I was certainly awake now! The water was generally blue and the visibility was good. That being said, there was a shocking dearth of life. At least, I was expecting to see more fishes and plant life. When I got closer to the rocks I could see the nudibranchs and other smaller organisms, but

you really had to look close for the most part. We made a loop around the boulders and then slowly climbed back up to the surface. I was glad to get one dive in before we did the cave dive. At least a chance to re-orientate myself with the gear and get a little more comfortable with 'the dive' again. I hadn't dove since the previous Fall.

It took some time for us all to get our gear off and back into the boat. Once on the boat, I think someone may have offered some water but when we'd arrived at the dive center that morning they'd announced there wouldn't be any snacks or drinks provided on the boat. Fortunately, we'd packed our own water just in case. I suppose it was nice someone offered some water at some point. *Still! I think it was the first time I hadn't been offered pacification cookies!* We waited for probably forty minutes before people started to slowly kit up again. By the time we were ready to descend it'd been just about an hour and a half. Oh yah, and one guy was sitting back by the motor smoking before getting ready...



Dive 2	
Site Name	Elephant Cave
Individual Stats	Linsey Warren
GPS Coordinates	35°28'8.55"N; 24°14'41.59"E (approx.)
Dive Master	Angelus and Stellus – except that time when Stellus disappeared
Max Depth	55ft / 16.8m
Bottom Time	1 hour 5 minutes (intermittent surface time in cave)
Start PSI	2,686 PSI
End PSI	440 PSI
Visibility	Good – except when we turned out lights off in the cave – then just dark.
Conditions (Current etc.)	Calm
Water Temperature	Max. 81F/ 27.2C Min. 73F/ 22.8C
Outside Temperature	Max. 96F / 36C (Rethymnon)
Surface Interval	1 hour 25 minutes (between dives)
Notes	N/A

The Story

I admit. I was nervous. Before I got in the water I had a moment where I let all of the concerns wash over me. What if we had an earthquake and got trapped in the cave? There was just a decent sized earthquake several days ago on another island. What if the light went out? What if I panicked? But, then

I had a YOLO moment! Better to do it than not! We told Angelus I was nervous so we'd have a plan of action, just in case I got in the cave and really had 'a moment'. I'd rather anticipate the worst and go in prepared than not. Angelus told me to stay close to him and he'd come back out with Kyle and I if I freaked out. Okay. That was the back-up plan! We descended to 35 feet and this time made our way back east towards the cave entrance which is underwater. Looking at the black space in front of me that was the entrance to the cave, I had a moment where I really wasn't so sure I wanted to go in. That only lasted a minute before the YOLO took over. I did stay close to Angelus though. Which, was good, because the little flashlight I'd been given wasn't really lighting up much. I tried not to look around too much to start, just focus on moving forward and remaining calm. It really didn't take too long before I noticed that air pockets were appearing above us and those gradually gave way to larger pockets until we were in the first chamber. I felt incrementally better knowing that there was an air pocket above me, but still not quite at ease. Angelus told us to stay underwater and enjoy the view that way and we'd then surface and swim around above water on our way back out (with the exception of the entrance which we'd have to dive down to again).



And so there it is. I found myself in a cave. On our way in, Angelus pointed out the fossilized elephant leg bones and the elephant molars which the German gent with the massive documentary video camera stopped to film and get good shots of. He called the camera 'my baby'. It was kind of funny. In the dark, part of the cave with only flashlights to light our way, it was hard to keep tabs on people, to know who was who and which group we were a part of. Another reason to stay close to Angelus.

As we swam along underwater I noticed a couple areas where stalactites had broken off and accumulated on the cave floor. *Great. Add dodging stalactites to the potential concerns.* In some ways, it was a little freaky being in a dark cave, in the water. If a light wasn't shining on something, it was just black. *Horror movies have been made out of less.* And yet, on the other hand, it had a very other worldly feel to it. If the elephant had moseyed in here and died, it had to have been at least during the last ice age or before, when the sea level would have been lower. Life had been visiting this spot for a long time. How cool to be a part of that history, even if it was just for a moment? We floated around in the second chamber for a while, shining the lights around and taking it in. At some point in this, Angelus started trying to find where his dad, Stellus had gone. He swam around for a bit but couldn't find him. *Uhh. Should we start scouring the cave underwater? Is this a big problem? Someone is officially missing... and it's one of the trip leaders.* Oddly, Angelus seemed really un-phased about it...

We snapped a few pictures and then slowly made our way back towards the entrance where we'd have to dive down again... without Stellus. Angelus indicated if we turned off our lights we could see the blue outline of the cave entrance and follow that light out. I don't think everyone wanted to do it, but I was curious to try and luckily got more towards the front so was able to head towards the lighter blue circle. It had that 'light at the end of the tunnel' feel to it which, interestingly, made it feel very peaceful. Until, I cracked my knee into something on the cave floor that I hadn't seen... because it was dark. *Magic interrupted!* But I did have a bit of a chuckle at my own expense. We snapped a few more photos on the way out, and as we came closer to the entrance a figure started to appear in the middle. I could only presume that was Stellus. *Hunh. So, he'd left the cave? What was the motto for the day again? Instill a little confidence?*

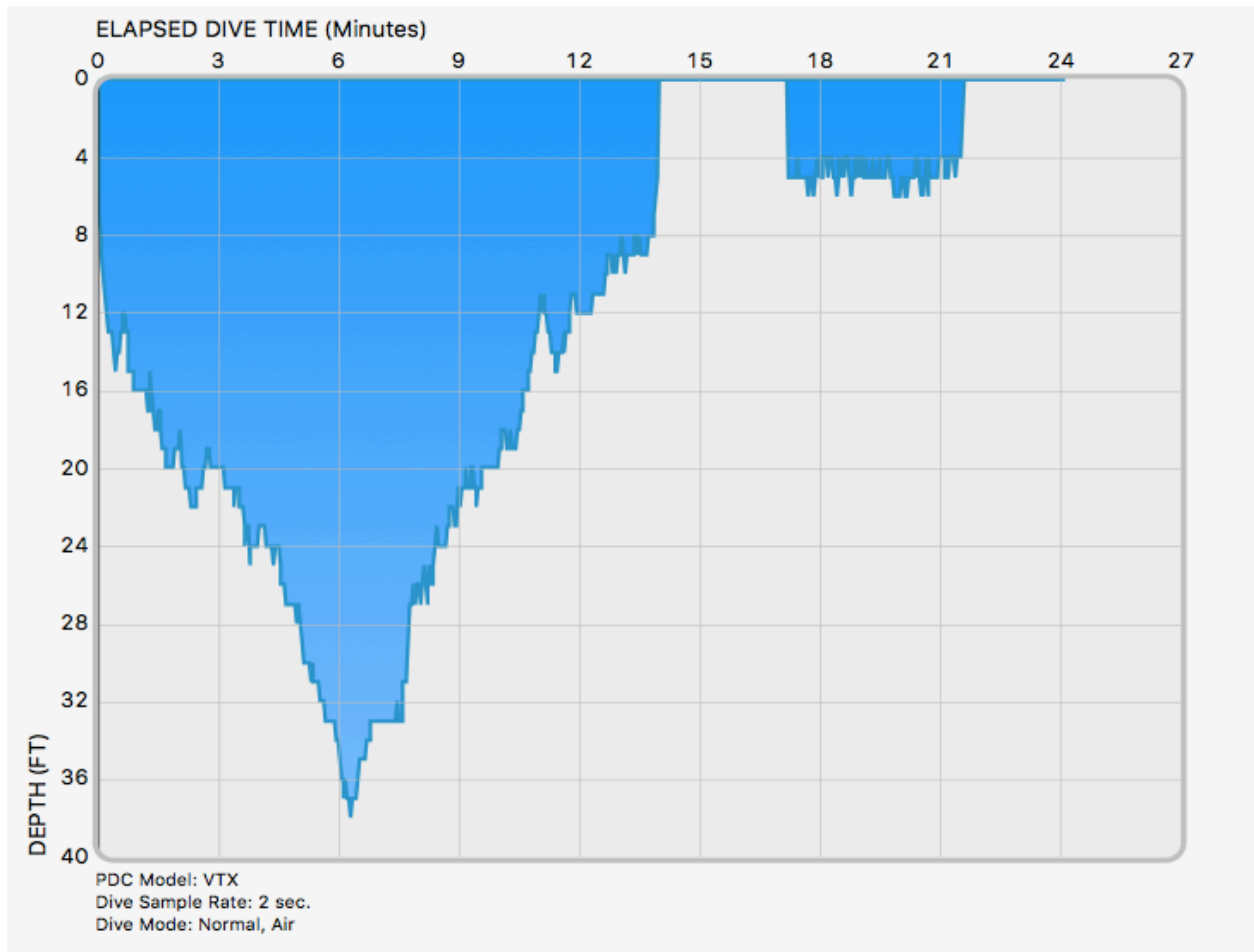


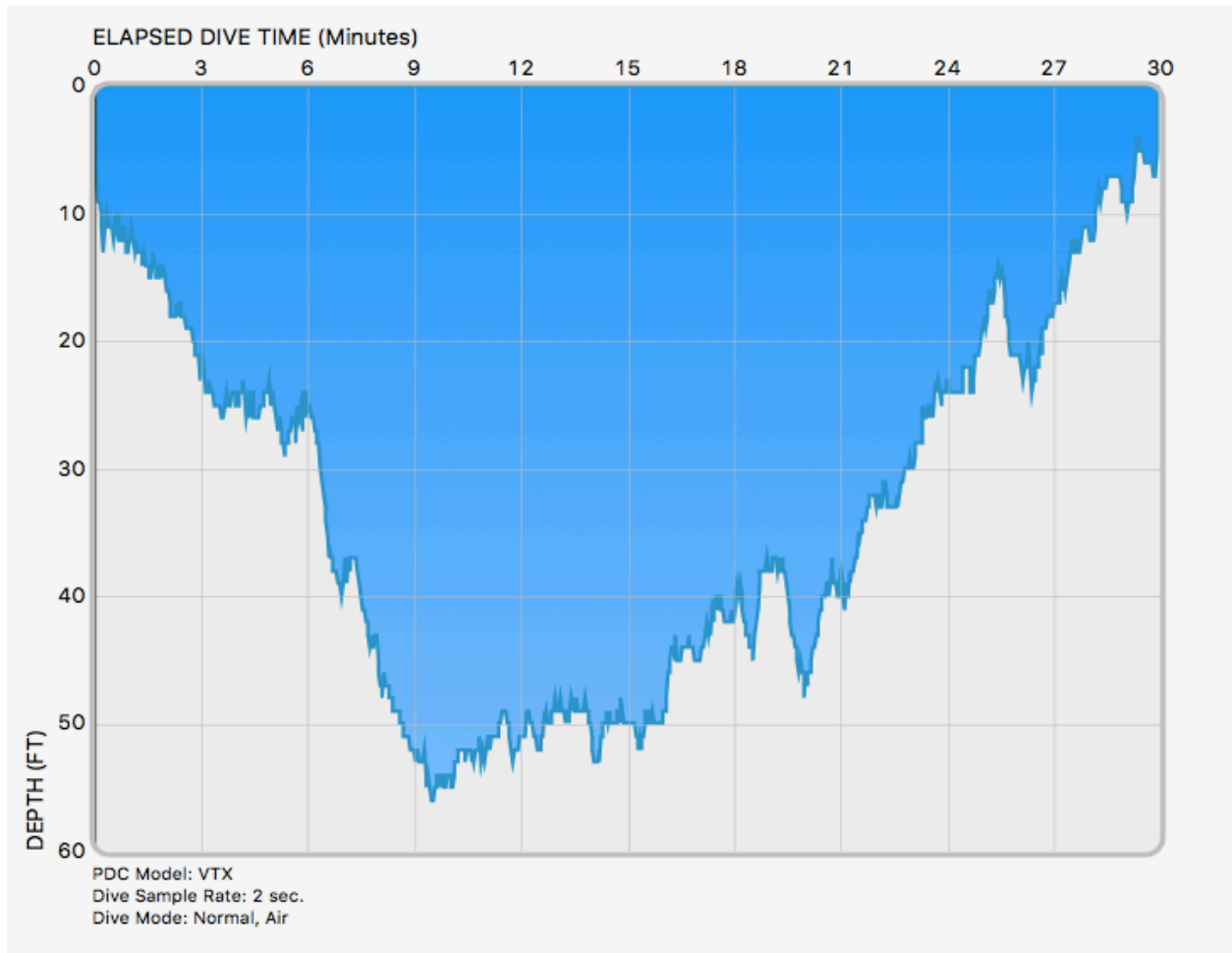
After we exited the cave we continued the dive in the same general vicinity as the first dive before ascending to the surface. As I was waiting on the surface, with my face in the water, looking around I noticed something flash on the bottom. It caught my attention so I floated over in that direction and realized it was almost certainly a knife. I flagged Kyle down and told him. It looked too shiny to be old but it was curious. Kyle dropped down (quite a bit, probably 30 or 40 feet) and grabbed it. Turns out

it was a modern rusted paring knife. *Booty!*

While waiting for the other divers to remove their gear and climb up onto the boat, I floated on my back, soaking up the gorgeous sun. It was beautiful. Once I shed my gear and climbed out of the water, I promptly stripped down to just my swimsuit and jumped back in for a swim. There is something absolutely delicious about swimming freely in water. Exposed and part of the wild. I yelled up to Kyle, "I'm a mermaid. I'm a mermaid. Kiss me!". Kyle leaned over the edge of the boat and I tried to swim up and kiss him like a mermaid. I missed the first time because it was quite a gap, so we tried again. I was worried that kicking so hard would tear off my toe nail, which was flapping around in the water (a memento from stubbing it earlier in the year on a climb). It felt so awkward! Fortunately, it did not fall off and I did manage to give him a light peck. It wasn't long before Stellus gave me a smile and waved me back into the boat and as I clambered back up the small ladder and tried to move around to the side with the least amount of stuff I slipped (being barefoot and wet) and cracked my ankle down on 'the baby'. *Mother of pearl!!!* It hurt. I let out a loud hiss that turned into a slightly obscured swear word. The two dive guides looked at me as I hobbled back on. Angelus looked down and said. "Unh. It's not bleeding. You're fine." *Solid. But... true at the same time!* It definitely left a mark! The ride back felt more stable, or perhaps I just knew what to expect. I was more relaxed and remembering how much I

like being on a boat on warm days in warm water. We got back to the center, unpacked the boat, rinsed our gear and left it at the shop since we'd be returning again on Wednesday for another round of diving, then loaded up in the van and headed back to our resort.





Lessons Learned
1. 11 people with tanks, gear, and a massive documentary dive camera can fit on a small boat without it sinking or tipping over.
2. Bar pressure measurements is a more euro form of measurement. Confusing underwater when I was signing PSI and Angelus swam over and grabbed my wrist monitor.
3. Surface too long and the dive computer will reset and start a 'second' dive.