



Beneath The Sea 2016 honors: CAPTAIN BILL PALMER NORTHEAST DIVING PIONEER

As a young boy in the mid 1950's, Captain Bill's family moved to a small house on a lake in Connecticut. It was there he started to skin dive. Bill had a deep curiosity as to what lay beneath the surface of the lake. He continued to skin dive both lake and ocean until the Army wanted him for Vietnam. The Army had a need for Paratroopers, so off Bill went to jump school. He jumped from helicopters, jets, and trained with special forces experimenting how to jump with military dogs. Discharged in December of 1967, having never actually gone to Vietnam, Bill began work as a construction worker. The State of Connecticut gave him a war bonus of \$300 for having served his country during a state of war. With this money Bill bought his first set of dive gear. There was much much more to come, he even bought a book on "How to Scuba Dive" from Caldor's. The cost of the book was one dollar and it was a U.S. Divers publication. Armed with his new scuba gear, (the tank turned out to be a fire extinguisher painted yellow), his book on how to dive, and a curiosity about ship wrecks and their history, off Bill went following his dream.



One wreck in particular caught his interest. It was the U-853, a German submarine sunk the last day of World War II off the coast of Rhode Island. There were no charter boats then, so Bill bought a small cabin boat for \$1,000 and off he went. It wasn't until the following year, after purchasing a Loran and depth sounder, that he actually found the U-853. The first of many of Bill's shipwreck finds. In 1974, Captain Bill Palmer earned his Coast Guard License and started carrying divers to the various shipwrecks along the New England coastline. Raising a family and not having much money, Capt. Bill often dove wearing rain gear beneath his often not-so- dry, dry suit. In the late 1970's Capt. Bill bought his first underwater camera followed by many, many video cameras. Now he could share what he was seeing with others.

Bill went on to do video presentations at numerous colleges and universities, including the United States Coast Guard Academy & Newport Naval War College, as well as being a speaker at Beneath the Sea.



Now Bill had become a force in local dive industry and a procession of boats followed his career, starting with The Pilot Fish and ending with the Thunderfish, There were six boats all together. The first boats were held together with duct tape (same as was used on his dive gear), hard work, and a prayer from above, but they all got the job done.

Captain Bill's award winning videos have been seen on major television networks including the Discovery Channel, History Channel, P.B.S. and other local news stations around the country.

In the book "Shadow Divers" he is described as a hard living, cigar chomping charter boat captain. Capt. Bill asks: "What is hard living?" He drinks coffee & tea and takes a nap every afternoon.