

# Raritan Man One of Few To Explore Titanic

By Stephen Van Etten

Two and a half miles beneath the Atlantic Ocean, the Titanic makes its watery grave on the sea bottom 500 miles off the coast of Newfoundland. Only around 100 people have plunged the depths to visit the "ultimate shipwreck." A Raritan Township man is one.

David Bright has been wreck diving for 32 years, collecting scientific and historical data on hundreds of downed ships. But his trip last month to visit the Titanic marks the pinnacle of his diving career.

"It was almost surreal and I did feel a lot of emotion," he said. "Just knowing that it's the Titanic, it just kind of grabs you."

The Titanic sank when it struck an iceberg on the night of April 14, 1912 on its maiden voyage from Southampton, England to New York City. The iceberg tore a huge hole in the ship, causing it to break in half, sending the bow and stern to the ocean floor about a half-mile apart. Over 1,500 of the 2,200 on board died and the ship's remains weren't discovered until 1985.

"A shipwreck is literally a time capsule. It's frozen in time back to the date it sank . . . So to me, it's like a chance to touch a piece of history," Mr. Bright said.

Working with a team of Russian scientists, he took the Russian research vessel Keldysh out to sea, then dove down in one of the ship's two submersibles, Mir I. Because of the extreme depths, the only way to

visit the wreck is in a pressurized submersible capsule. It takes about three and a half hours to make the two and a half mile trip to the bottom.

Mr. Bright, using a special camera, shot hours of footage of the wreck as the capsule glided back and forth between the remains of the bow and stern and over the half-mile debris field in between. He uses the footage for a photometric analysis of the wreck's condition, comparing shots he's taken to ones taken in years past. Unfortunately, he said, the Titanic is quickly rusting away.

"It's deteriorating at quite a rapid rate," he said.

The debris field between the bow and stern is filled with passenger artifacts that are still clearly visible on the ocean floor, including wine bottles, luggage, china, plates and cups.

While Mr. Bright, 46, is the director of clinical information services for Pfizer, Inc. in New York City by profession, his lifetime of wreck diving is clearly more than a hobby, but instead a passion that dates back to his youth growing up in the Great Lakes region. A graduate of Penn State with a biophysics degree and Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a master's in physiology, he has been employed by the U.S. and foreign governments to study and salvage various shipwrecks. In addition to his work

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**THE ULTIMATE SHIPWRECK** — Raritan Township resident David Bright took this photo of the bow of the wreckage of the Titanic during a trip to the doomed ship's resting place. Below, he holds one of three 1912 U.S. \$2.50 gold pieces he took down in a Russian submersible to the bottom of the Atlantic. He brought the gold pieces, from the year the Titanic sank, to give to each of his children as a memento of his remarkable expedition.

