

# Former Staten Islander dies in scuba mishap

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Family photo Joseph D. Terzuoli -- known as Captain Zero -- was a former Todt Hill resident and expert scuba diver who logged more than 3,500 dives. Terzuoli, 46, died Saturday in waters 53 miles east of Atlantic City during a dive to a sunken freighter.

He was a giant in the scuba diving world, logging more than 3,500 dives, many of them to the underwater resting place of the famed Andrea Doria ocean liner.

On Saturday, Joseph D. Terzuoli -- known as Captain Zero -- made his final dive.

Terzuoli died in the waters 53 miles east of Atlantic City during a dive to a sunken freighter. He was 46 years old.

Authorities are still investigating how Terzuoli -- a former Todt Hill resident who moved to Wall Township, N.J. three years ago -- met his end.

A spokesman with the New Jersey State Police said Terzuoli may have become tangled in some wires or fishing line, and couldn't get himself free.

Terzuoli, the captain of the boat John Jack, was alone underwater, diving the wreckage of the Texel -- a Dutch steamer that was sunk by a German U-boat in 1918 -- when the accident took place, officials said.

Another diver on his boat noticed something was amiss when his bubbles stopped coming up to the surface of the water, said Sgt. Stephen Jones, a spokesman for the New Jersey State Police.

Petty Officer Jonathan Lindberg, a U.S. Coast Guard spokesman, said Terzuoli's scuba mask was off when his crew retrieved him.

Terzuoli, a mechanical engineer by profession, had been diving since he was 13 years old, said his wife, Susan.

"Diving was his life," she said last night.

His diving resume included trips to Truk Lagoon and Bikini Atoll in the Pacific, and he went on more than 250 dives to the Andrea Doria, the Italian luxury liner that sank 90 miles east of Montauk, L.I., in 1956.

Professional divers call the Andrea Doria the "Mount Everest of wreck diving," because of the skill necessary to navigate the boat's twisting halls and treacherous cables and netting.

In a 2002 interview with the Advance, Terzuoli explained his passion for wreck diving, particularly off the coasts of New York.

"I've been diving all over the world and [diving off New York coasts] is it. It's the most exciting, most challenging, and most rewarding. I've been to Mexico, the Cayman Islands, and other tropical places and they are nice and fun, but how many pretty fish can you look at? Here you can peer into a room in a wreck that no one has ever been to," Terzuoli said.

Every diving season, he and his 18-person crew would frequently travel to Montauk and as far south as Hatteras, N.C.

He also made it a habit of taking out Boy Scout troops and first-time divers for free, just so he could teach them about diving.

"He was probably one of the most generous, giving men that you'd ever come across," said his wife, Susan. "If you were willing to put the time in, he was willing to sit with you for hours and hours, and days and days, and teach you what you needed to know."

Born in Brooklyn, he was brought to Todt Hill as a teenager and settled in Wall Township three years ago.

He went to Susan Wagner High School, and earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in mechanical engineering from the Pratt Institute in Manhattan.

Terzuoli worked as a mechanical engineer for Master Design, a family-owned business in Brooklyn.

He operated the John Jack out of Great Kills Harbor for more than 20 years before moving to New Jersey. And his boat was the second to bear that name -- his wife helped him design the newer John Jack seven years ago.

Terzuoli was the secretary of the Eastern Dive Boat Association, and a member of a New Jersey Rifle Association. He also loved animals, and horses in particular, his wife said.

In addition to his wife of four years, the former Susan Scarangelo, he is survived by a son,

Nicholas, and a brother, Dominick. He also took in and raised his nephew, Stephen Bilotti.

Arrangements are being handled by Casey Funeral Home, Castleton Corners. The details of his funeral service have not yet been finalized.

--- *Contributed by John Annese*