



Camera Housing Drifts Across the North Sea, Gets Reunited With Owner

Text and photos by Peter Symes

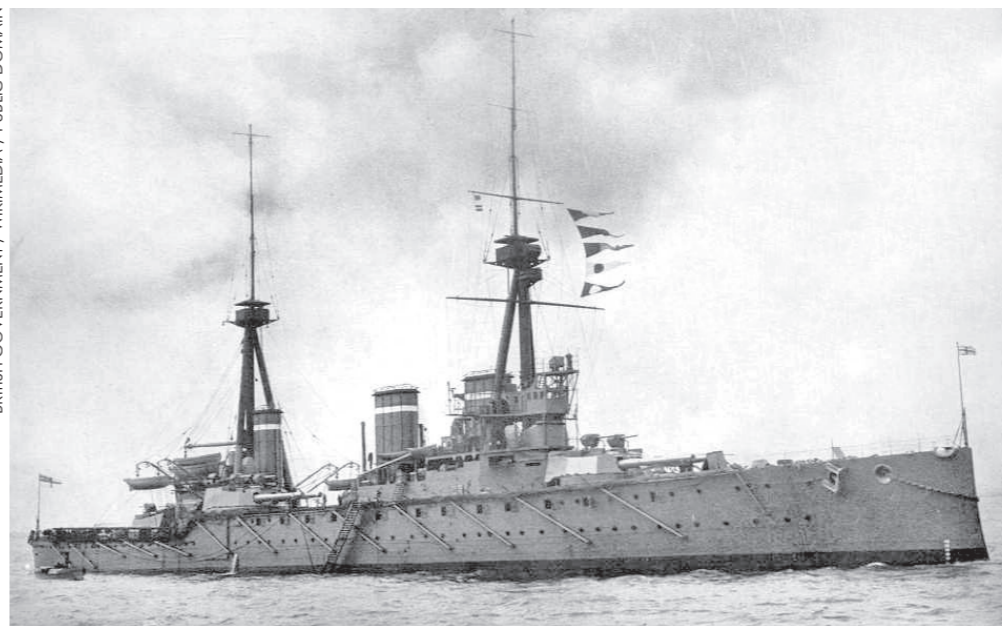
What are the chances? Imagine that you are out in the middle of the North Sea, doing some dives on the WWI battleships, when the tether to your expensive camera rig snaps. Surely, you have lost your gear in deep water far from shore, never to be seen again. Not so, it turns out, for a very lucky diver and underwater photographer from the Emirates. Peter Symes has the story.

On a recent visit, I was sitting quietly at a dive club up on Denmark's northernmost tip, deep in thought, reflecting on the dive I had just done with the club and their excellent dive boat, when a club member came through the door. "See what was just found on the nearby beach!" he exclaimed. In his hand, he held a large underwater camera housing with a dome port. Upon closer inspection, it turned out to be an Easydive Leo 3 housing with a Sony A7R3 camera inside, fitted with a 14mm lens. It was quite an expensive piece of kit—about €10K worth, I would guess.

Finding the owner

"So, how are we going to find the owner? Should we make a post on Facebook?" someone suggested. I think we all felt the pain the owner must have felt when he realised that he had lost his gear and the images he had taken. I recognised the brand and knew it was unlikely to belong to a local (Danish) underwater photographer since the brand is not marketed in Denmark and does not have any representatives here, as far as I know. It must have belonged to a tourist, I reckoned—probably German, as many German tourists drive to this location on holiday and

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The Easydive Leo 3 housing sat on the table in the dive club, appearing to be in very good condition (top left). The coastline where the housing washed up is usually rather rough (above). This image was taken only one or two days before the housing was found a few kilometres further up the very same beach. The battleship HMS *Invincible* is now one of the several impressive wrecks resting on the bottom of the North Sea (left). It was sunk in 1916 during the Battle of Jutland, the largest naval battle and only full-scale clash of battleships of the First World War.

also to dive. An announcement on Facebook would probably not yield results. In which forum or group would you post it anyway?

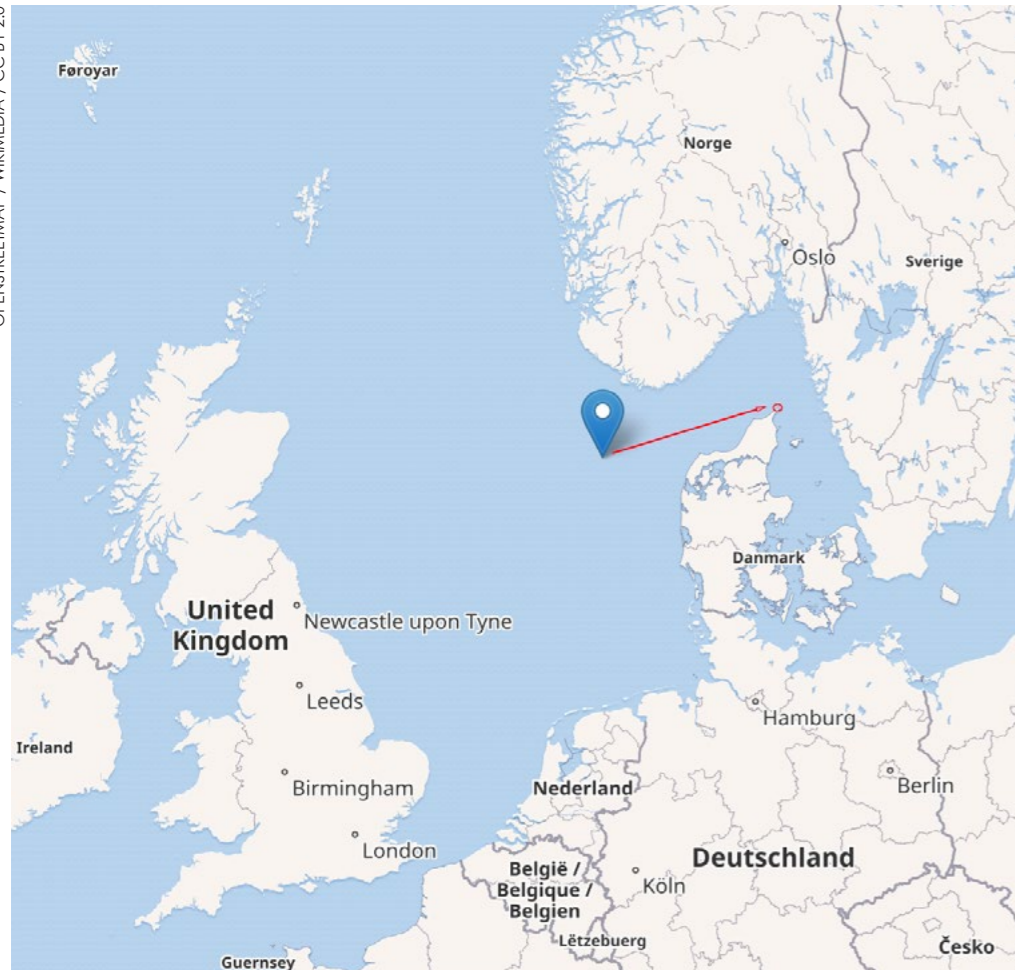
As an underwater photographer, I knew that housings of this calibre were made to order. I also happened to know the manufacturer,

Fabio Benvenuti. So, I opened the housing to look for a serial number. I also quickly scanned through the images in the camera to see if there was anything that could help identify and locate the rightful owner, but I only saw lots of dive images, some taken in our green waters and others clearly

taken in a warm location with blue water—but nothing helpful. However, I noted that the camera was switched on and had plenty of battery life, and the housing appeared to be in good shape—not scraped, banged up or anything. I figured it must have been lost within the last day or two.

The map below shows the astonishing distance the housing drifted from the wreck site of HMS *Invisible* in the matter of only a week before it was stranded near the tip of Denmark on Skagen Nordstrand.

OPENSTREETMAP / WIKIMEDIA / CC BY 2.0



It turned out to have been much longer ago.

A big surprise

I sent an email to Fabio explaining the find and sent him images of the gear in which the serial number could be seen. I asked if he could possibly identify his client so that we could reconnect him with this lost equipment. Within an hour, I got a reply from Fabio, who had already been informed by the client that he had lost his camera. I was in for a big surprise...

The client, a technical diver from the UAE, had lost his camera not at or even near the beach where it was found, but out in the middle of the North Sea after a dive on the Battle of Jutland wrecks. The housing had been lost about a week earlier and, in that short time span, had drifted a whopping 279km (151 nautical miles) or about 40km per day, as the crow flies, and probably much further as currents meander, before washing up on the beach at Skagen Nordstrand,



Inside the housing was a Sony A7R3 with plenty of battery power left (above left). The serial number, which was presumed to link the housing and camera to its owner (above right).



at the very top of Denmark.

Here, the surf is usually quite strong, and the waves pound the coast, as the area is directly exposed to the predominantly westerly winds that blow in from the North Sea and the Atlantic. Over many centuries, countless vessels have been stranded on this coast, driven mercilessly ashore by gales and storms, and brutally shattered on the shoals.

But on the Sunday that the housing was found, the ocean was calm, and it so happened that one of the dive club members was out for a walk on the beach when his wife spotted a curious object in the shallow water that did not resemble typical flotsam. So, she waded out and picked it up.

The rest, as they say, is history. Before long, the underwater housing was shipped back and reunited with its owner. What are the chances of all those fortunate circumstances lining up?

Inverted Swiss cheese model of accidents

In recreational and technical diving, the Swiss cheese model is often used to illustrate how multiple small failures—such as equipment issues, poor planning or diver error—can align to cause an accident. Each safety protocol (e.g., buddy checks, dive planning and redundancy) acts as a defence layer. When the “holes” in these defences line up, a serious incident can occur, showing the need for multiple, overlapping safeguards to manage risk effectively.

In this case, however, it can also be used to illustrate the extreme unlikelihood of this happy outcome.

- Once lost, the housing had to remain buoyant and not sink so that it could drift.
- It had to drift to a location where it could be found.
- It had to come ashore

undamaged.

- It had to be found by someone who recognised it for what it was.
- It had to be found by someone honest who was concerned about finding its owner.
- It also had to be seen by someone like me, who could connect the dots and contact the manufacturer.

What are the chances, indeed? But what a happy ending! Everyone involved was pleased with the outcome. ■

The owner, Ali Fikree from the United Arab Emirates, understandably looks pleased after being reunited with his precious kit.

