

> Maritime
Cybersecurity 70

> Export
Machine 20

> Saudi Arabia:
The Sisyphus of Oil? 16

September/October 2017

The MARITIME EXECUTIVE

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY FOR EXECUTIVES

+China's
NEW Silk
Road
30

Global
Salvage
Review
38

George A.
Tsavliris

Principal,
Tsavliris Salvage
Group 58

Boud Van Rompay

Founder & CEO, Hydrex and Subsea Industries

Diver, entrepreneur, inventor, author, Van Rompay sets the bar high. His goal? Creating technologies to keep our oceans, seas and waterways clean.

BY JACK O'CONNELL



TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF. HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE MARITIME BUSINESS?

I abandoned my legal studies to become a cave explorer, cave diver and mountaineer, making breakthroughs in cave exploration and laying the foundation for a future in underwater technology. After first diving as a hobby, I began work as a commercial diver in Antwerp, Belgium, carrying out underwater ship repair and maintenance. It was during this work that I came face-to-face with the horrific levels of water pollution and sediment contamination created by ships and, in particular, their antifouling systems, which were turning ports into dead zones and creating an unsustainable future for ports, oceans and waterways.

That was in 1973, and since then I have been committed to developing systems and technologies that can keep our oceans, seas and waterways clean.

WHAT LED YOU TO FOUND FIRST HYDREX AND THEN SUBSEA INDUSTRIES? WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO?

I set up Hydrex (HYDRoEXpertise) with the goal of clean rivers, seas and oceans. We launched the company in 1974 to develop maximum expertise with water so as to attain the goal of clean oceans. That is still our purpose. Water is the biggest commod-

ity on the planet, and we need to look after it and preserve it for future generations.

The main difference between Hydrex and Subsea Industries is that Hydrex provides services, while Subsea offers products. We launched Subsea Industries in 1982 with the development of new underwater hull-cleaning machines and tools. Then in the late 1990s we expanded into new coating technologies.

ARE YOU THE SOLE OWNER OF BOTH COMPANIES?

Yes.

YOU ARE NOT ONLY A PROFESSIONAL DIVER BUT ALSO A RENOWNED INVENTOR AND THE HOLDER OF NUMEROUS PATENTS FOR PRODUCTS LIKE ECOSPEED AND ECOSHIELD. WHAT IS YOUR SECRET?

I suppose it has something to do with an inherent entrepreneurial spirit and not taking what others say as gospel. To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, progress is dependent on the unreasonable, and that kind of summarizes my approach to problems. I take what is often considered an unreasonable approach, and I think I have made good progress – particularly with respect to developing new solutions that can keep our oceans clean without impacting shipping operations or budgets.

DO YOU STILL DIVE?

Yes, absolutely. I dived about six months ago – looking at ships' hulls coated with Ecospeed to assess the coating and develop the product. All my white papers are written based on my personal observations and the phenomena I have witnessed taking place underwater.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE RIGHT NOW?

The biggest challenge I face right now is managing to successfully disrupt the status quo. I want to change the marine coatings business model, which is entirely based on repeat business. This is something very close to my heart as there is no need for this constant repainting and recoating. There are other environmentally safe and cost-effective ways to protect hulls.

WHAT DRIVES YOU?

WHAT IS YOUR PASSION?

I always set the bar high and try to achieve my goals. But a constant personal driver is to be an expert on how the water column and sediment are impacted and to promote ocean sustainability. We need to look after the water on this planet. If we don't, then humankind won't be here for long.

MarEx

JACK O'CONNELL is the magazine's Senior Editor.



To read the entire interview, log onto www.maritime-executive.com/ea-vanrompay.