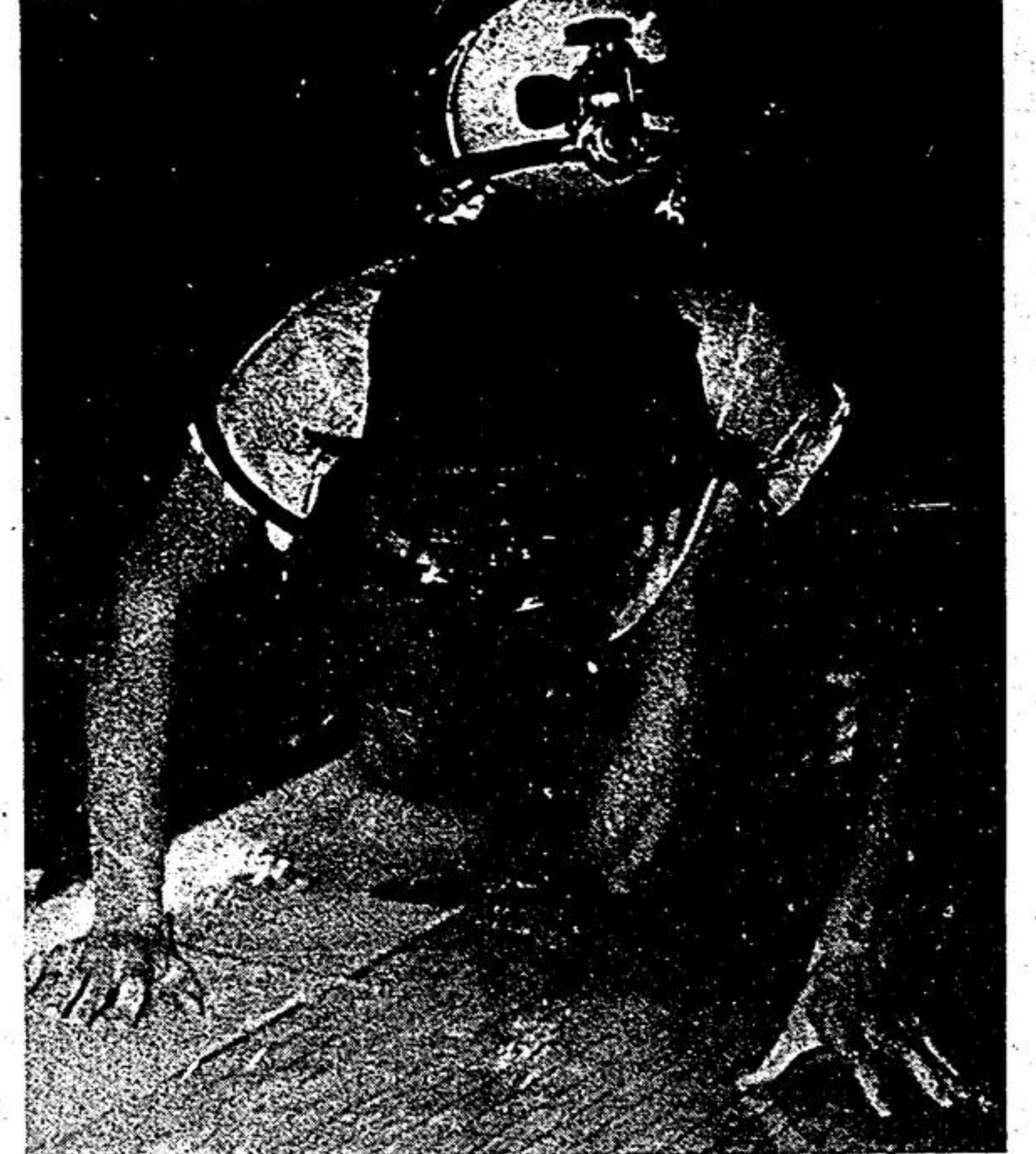


Diving students at Uxpool check out diving gear before entering the pool. Students are, from left: Peter Brezneckar, Tom Rogers,

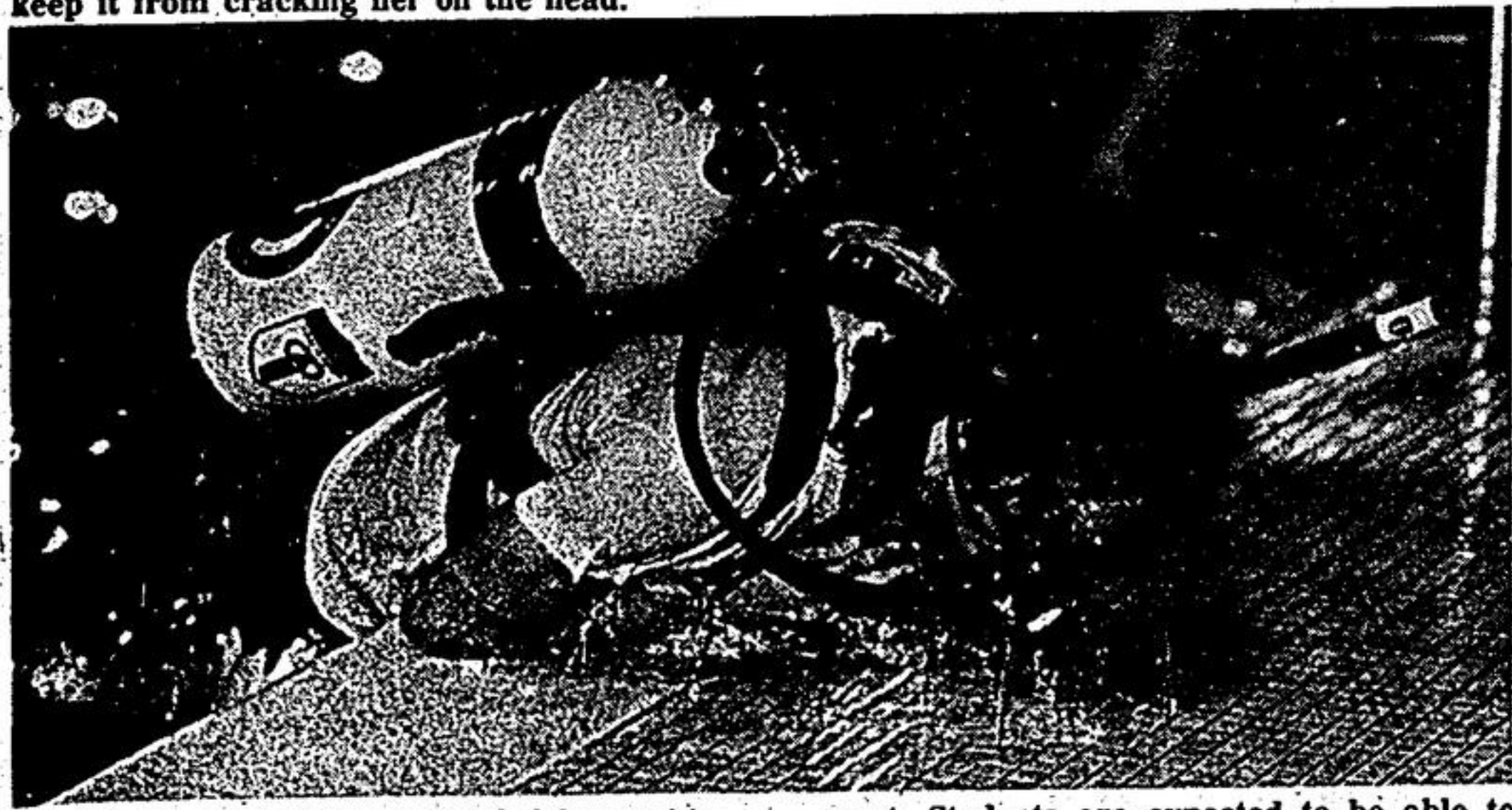
Shawn Campbell, Terry Williams and Rick Rezkar.



Scuba tanks feel almost weightless underwater but on dry ground it's a different thing as this student finds out. As well as carrying the heavy tank the student has to adjust to walking with flippers on. Diver at left has his head above the water and as a result appears headless.



Judy Dell tries a front roll entry into the pool. Notice one hand holds the air tank to keep it from cracking her on the head.



Climbing out of the pool loaded down with diving gear proves a difficult task. Divers have to be in good shape as it is a rigorous

sport. Students are expected to be able to swim 16 lengths of the pool in 10 minutes by the end of the course.

Would-be divers take the plunge Tribune investigates underwater

By John Montgomery

It's a spooky moment, the first time you launch yourself into the pool, defying all the laws of nature by breathing underwater. You take a tentative, loudly hissing, breath and exhale a torrent of noisy, bubbles that cascade to the surface. You become super aware of your breathing, not only because you find yourself breathing underwater, but also because the inhaling and exhaling, constant loud noises, are the only sounds you hear.

Scuba (self contained underwater breathing apparatus) students were photographed recently by Svend DeBruyn and myself at the courses held at Uxpool in Uxbridge. The courses are fairly rigorous and the drop-out rate is high. To begin with a medical certificate is required and the student must be in reasonable physical condition or prepared to get him or herself into that condition.

Most scuba instructors require their students to be able to swim between 15 and 20 laps of the pool as a requirement for getting a diving certificate.

Larry Olson, the instructor operating out of Uxpool requires 16 laps in 10 minutes by the end of the course.

A diver has to be fairly strong to even get into the water without doing himself a great injury. Once loaded down with air tank, wet suit, a lead weighted belt, to combat buoyancy and diving flippers it is difficult to move on the surface. Divers, in fact, look ludicrously funny shuffling, along in their peculiar hump-backed manner.

Once in the water though and all this weight just disappears and with the long flippers the diver is propelled effortlessly through the water. One of the great attractions of diving is that you actually become part of the underwater environment, as long as your air lasts. Diving is a little like flying in the air. You float above the ground, changing direction with a kick of the feet.

You realize that underwater there are mountains and valleys, cliffs and plains to be explored.

One of the frightening things about taking a diving course is that you learn about such charming creatures as sea snakes that travel through the oceans in packs, devouring everything in their path. A bite from one of these monsters causes death in

about an hour and the recently invented antidote for the poison is almost impossible to obtain.

Reassuringly though, there are no poisonous creatures, or plain vicious ones like sharks and barracudas, in Ontario's waters. They can't survive in our icy lakes.

Unfortunately neither can humans. Diving Ontario usually requires use of a wet suit, even in summer, as the temperature variation, once you get down 15 or 20 feet down, is almost nothing from winter to summer.

This circumstance makes diving in this country an expensive proposition. To get completely outfitted with mask, flippers, weight belt, tanks, regulator, flotation vest and wet suit can cost in the neighbourhood of \$5-600.

Many Ontario residents become licensed divers only so they will be able to dive when they go to more temperate climes.

Diving regulations used to be pretty slack and as a result many inexperienced divers were killed or crippled. As a result there are very few places you can rent or buy diving gear without proof you have taken a diving course.

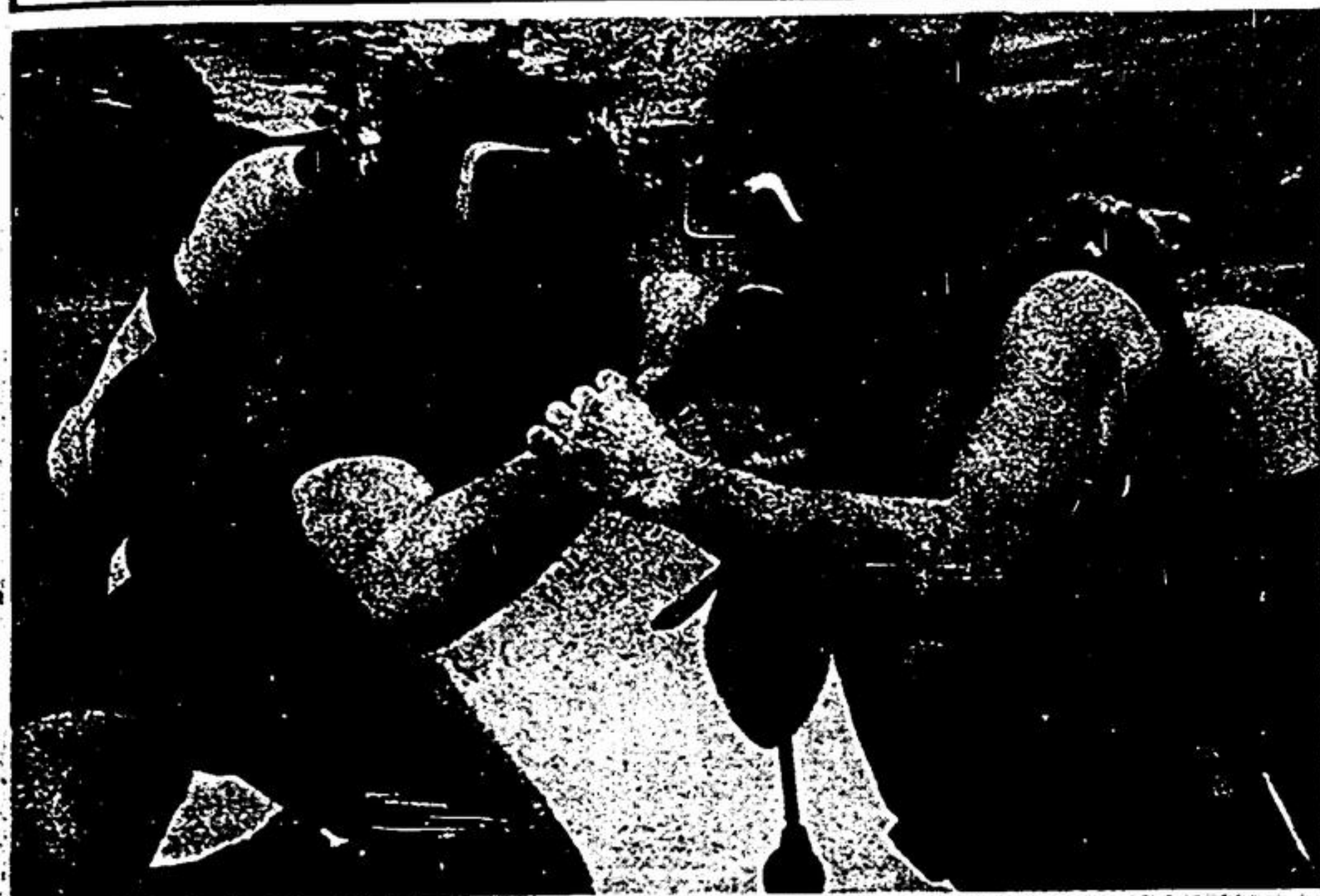
After completing the pool and lecture parts of the course the student must successfully complete two open water dives before being granted a certificate.

These open water dives would make the proverbial brass monkey wince.



Diving instructor Larry Olson helps student Judy Dell into her diving gear. The heavy air tanks are hard to handle on dry ground. Judy was the only girl enrolled in the fall diving course held at Uxpool.

Photos by John Montgomery and Svend DeBruyn



Scuba students have to learn how to "buddy breathe." This is when two people share the air from one tank, using one regulator. It is a safety precaution so divers

will know how to share air in case one runs out during the dive. The few seconds you don't have air seems like hours when you are underwater.



John Montgomery, fearless Tribune editor, takes to the deep to cover scuba course.



At left Shawn Campbell makes a stride jump entry into the pool while above photographer Svend DeBruyn surfaces after session of picture taking at bottom of pool. Svend provided the waterproof camera that made the underwater pictures possible.