

Diving Deep into Naval History, Navy Diving Executive Steering Committee Celebrates Origins of U.S. Navy Diving Community



SHERIDAN LAKE, British Columbia (March 14, 2023) Divers conduct an emergency search procedures drill under the ice of Sheridan Lake, British Columbia, while participating in an Ice Diving Exercise (ICEDIVEX) involving Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit (MDSU) 1 and the Canadian Armed Forces' Fleet Diving Unit Pacific, March 14, 2023. The ICEDIVEX enhanced interoperability between U.S. and Canadian diving units by accomplishing joint technical diving and unit-level training evolutions. MDSU-1 is a component of Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group (EODGRU) 1 that provides combatant commanders the expeditionary capability to clear ports, piers and waterways; assist vessels in distress; and conduct salvage of ships, aircraft and other objects from the water. (U.S. Navy courtesy photo) 230314-N-N2422-0003

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By NECC Public Affairs

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VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – They may dive the world over, but the humble beginnings of U.S. Navy divers first began on August 1, 1882 in local waters off of Newport, Rhode Island according to Navy leaders who recently voted on establishing an official birth date for the community.

The Navy's diving executive steering committee, comprised of officers and senior enlisted leaders across warfare communities who have a vested interest in Navy diving and undersea operations, worked closely with Naval History and Heritage Command, the Naval Undersea Museum, Navy Diving and Salvage Training Center, and the Man in the Sea Museum, a military diving museum, to research the origins of the U.S. Navy diving inception date.

"Recognizing the birthday of Navy diving gives the entire diving community an opportunity to not only honor our proud lineage but also take a moment to reflect on the monumental contributions of brave pioneers such as William Badders and Robert Barth, along with trailblazers of professional achievement such as Carl Brashear and Mary Bonnin, who have contributed significantly to where we are today," said Master Chief Navy Diver Will Wittman, Navy Expeditionary Combat Command force master diver. "Understanding the arc of our evolution from a single class of six students at the Newport Torpedo School in 1882 to the innovation and capability I have known through the course of my career is truly humbling for me to reflect upon."

During their research, the committee learned Gunner's Mates served as some of the Navy's first divers. The introduction of the torpedo revolutionized naval warfare and prompted the need for additional undersea training to support testing and recovery of the ordnance. In turn, the Navy established a new course of instruction in Newport to provide the most relevant training for the emerging undersea technology at the time.

Historians from the Navy's museums corroborated this information with reports from the Secretary of the Navy's archives from 1882-1883. An excerpt from the report described the new course of instruction in "submarine diving." According to the documents, six gunners reported on August 1, 1882 for a three-day course directed by the Bureau of Ordnance.

Rear Adm. Brad Andros, commander, Navy Expeditionary Combat Command, said recognizing the inception date for the Navy Diving community not only marks a momentous occasion in naval history but also increases diving community connectedness.

“I’m honored to join Navy divers across the service in commemorating our community, past and present,” said Andros. “Navy divers are tasked with some of the most difficult and dangerous missions in the world and must be able to operate in extreme environments, under intense pressure, and with a high degree of precision. Our teammates have routinely embraced this challenge throughout our 141-year history, and I anticipate the entire force will continue to rise to the occasion and adapt to new threats, challenges, and adversaries for years to come.”

According to Naval History and Heritage Command, since their inception, Navy divers have been involved in nearly every major conflict throughout history and have been a forerunner for advancing the diving and underwater operations industry through technology and tactics. In peacetime or in combat, U.S. Navy divers have rose to the occasion, including seven divers who have been awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation’s highest military award.

For Master Chief Navy Diver Jeremy Sylvest of the Navy’s Recruiting Command, August 1 now presents an opportunity to inform the next generation of Navy Sailors what a career in diving offers.

“The Navy is always looking for motivated, creative, disciplined, problem-solving candidates to serve as Navy Divers and contribute to the excellent culture we continue to build,” said Sylvest. “A career in Navy diving offers opportunities for travel and adventure, a unique working environment, specialized training, and the chance to lead and

build teams. Navy diving is the best kept secret in the Navy.”

Diving capabilities are not solely restricted to the Navy Diver rating as many other ratings receive specialized dive training to complete their missions including Seabees, special operators, explosive ordnance disposal technicians, engineers, medical personnel, and mass communication specialists.

Navy divers support a number of missions in the Navy including mobile diving and salvage, ship husbandry, research and development, submarine operations and undersea rescue missions, special warfare, expeditionary mine countermeasures, anti-terrorism and force protection, and underwater photography and videography.

While this year’s commemorative events will be celebrated locally at individual commands, the diving community is focused on planning a global event for 2024 that will encompass Navy diver participation from across the world.

“I’m honored to be a part of this community and look forward to advancing our capability with all service and international partners, along with welcoming new leaders of tomorrow into our fold as we honor our historic roots each year,” said Wittman.

For more information about becoming a Navy Diver, visit <https://www.navy.com/careers/navy-diver>.