

Fleet Week NYC 2017 – Celebration of the Sea Services ...and 75th Anniversary of the US Navy Seabees Construction Force

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Dive News Network participated in **Fleet Week New York City 2017** for the 29th Fleet Week celebration of the sea services, and was granted press access by the Navy to ships and personnel, including Navy divers and the Seabees Naval Construction Forces. During FW-NYC-‘17, ships of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard, as well as military and scientific research ships from both the U.S. and partner nations, convened at various berths in the greater NYC metropolitan area around Memorial Day. Fleet Week concluded after Memorial Day, and the ships departed for further duties.

This year - with close to 4,000 Marines, Sailors and Coast Guardsmen participating - the reach and range of activities resulted in the best Fleet Week ever! The Navy and NYC government did a terrific job pulling together all the logistics for this huge celebration, and are to be heartily commended.



There were a couple of “damp” days during FW-NYC-‘17, *but absolutely nothing* could put a damper on the boundless enthusiasm and spirit of the men and women sailors and Marines of Fleet Week!

A mere *sampling* of events: the parade of ships entered NYC harbor with the traditional cannon salute by Brooklyn's Fort Hamilton (returned by flagship amphibious assault ship *USS Kearsarge*); a commemoration service was conducted at the World Trade Center Memorial; there were tours given of the ships by proud sailors and Marines showcasing their gear and mission, and there were Coast Guard search-and-rescue helicopter



in the US); visiting sailors kept faith with the fallen at local cemeteries; the always-anticipated Marine vs. Navy tug-of-war was held – (with Navy prevailing this time!); Navy personnel supported Project Healing Waters (using fly fishing to heal emotional wounds of challenged veterans); Seabees did *what they do so well - building* – with Habitat for Humanity, and visited senior centers and honoring aging veterans; there were honor



guards, impressively mesmerizing Coast Guard silent drill team

exhibitions, battle-of-the-bands, parades, bright signal flags and pageantry; the Navy Seabees helped NYC kids get stoked about



Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM); the Marines conducted physical fitness challenges; rocked with Miley Cyrus, the Late Show with Steve Colbert and The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon; all forces got the lead out with the 'Freedom Run', got in a baseball and

golf game; NYrs had the chance to say *'thanks for your service!'* to our sea services personnel; there was Career Day aboard *USS Kearsarge* for the Girl Scouts; kids played Tic-Tac-Toe with Navy divers in the Navy Dive Tank; personnel attended Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral and admired works of art at NYC's expansive Metropolitan Museum of Art; there were vendor demonstrations and information booths; and finally Navy brass, NYC government and Intrepid Museum officials concluded the week with an inspirational commemoration service on Memorial Day at Intrepid Hanger 2, honoring our fallen armed services personnel.



One of the best things for New Yorkers about FW-NYC-'17 was hearing the positive reactions of the sailors and Marines manning the rails aboard their ships coming into New York



Harbor; after all, native New Yorkers love their city - grievously wounded on 9/11 - but having returned with resolute determination - with our new, striking World Trade Center soaring into the sky in defiance of those who do not wish us well. Captain Getz, commanding Fleet Week flagship *USS Kearsarge* gave comments to the press, and spoke about the *USS Kearsarge* and her many missions in the war against terrorism, and with pride spoke about the numerous humanitarian operations conducted by Marines and sailor embarked.



Captain Getz also related to *DNN* that he, ship's company and all embarked felt a surge of pride, felt American history coming alive and appreciated the heartfelt welcome of NY'rs upon entering NY harbor – seeing



the proud, handsome Manhattan skyline edging closer, sailing under the mighty Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, receiving an artillery salute of honored welcome from Brooklyn's Fort Hamilton (returned with

gusto!), observing with awe 'Lady Liberty' - our nation's Statue of Liberty and also Ellis Island, where millions of immigrants who built our nation were processed into the USA – at the end of one journey from the Old World to the New World - and beginning their new journey, breathing free and filled with the promise of the freedoms we hold self-evident and for which our forebears fought and died. From NY'rs: "Welcome! Sailors, Coasties and Marines, and all visitors!"

Memorial Day 2017 in NY/NJ will always hold a painful poignancy. On Sunday May 28, a Navy SEAL perished when his parachute malfunctioned during the Navy's Leap Frog parachute drop at Liberty State Park (LSP), New Jersey. On Memorial Day, we remember all our veterans who have given all their tomorrows for our todays, and the newest addition to this honored rollcall was memorialized by Chaplain Captain J. Moger and US Fleet Command Admiral P. Davidson at the Intrepid Memorial Day commemoration. Our armed services train hard to forge the skills necessary to defend American interests around the world, and yet as this accident manifests, our forces are in harm's way even while training here at home. The close-knit SEAL community was hit hard by this loss, as were all members of the Navy.

This SEAL on eternal patrol has formed up with many comrades, and will watch over and defend American interests - and fellow sailors - on, over and beneath the sea's surface.

There were **so many events underway** that it was impossible for *Dive News Network* to take advantage of all opportunities. Of most interest to us as divers were the Navy divers, master divers and the Seabees -- but other Sea Services events and teams surface for special attention!

The Coast Guard is our nation's oldest continuous sea service, with an unbroken history since it was established in 1790. The Coast Guard is part of the Department of Homeland Security (not in the Department of Defense). Sleek, formidable *USCGC Hamilton* participated in FW-NYC-'17, and quickly caught everyone's eye. 400' and handsome, this ship is the Coast Guard's most advanced cutter class. The Coast Guard and *USCGC Hamilton* are missioned to provide homeland security, drug and smuggling interdiction and other law enforcement, vessel inspection and maritime safety/search and rescue, port security, environmental protection, national defense, and counter-terrorism. *DNN* regrets not having the opportunity to visit her



and crew, but definitely will next time. The Coast Guard also provided helicopter search and rescue demonstrations and "wow'ed" the audiences on several occasions/locations during FW-NYC-'17 with precision flying and sea rescue operations. Coastguardsman Officer-in-Training Jacqueline Gambale hails from Staten Island, NY and she staffed the Coast Guard booth at LSP talking about the Coast Guard mission and 'a day in the life of a Coastie!' At prior Fleet Weeks, *DNN* visited a Coast



Guard ice breaker, and the beautiful, majestic *USCGC Eagle*, a three-masted barque sailing ship - one of only two US commissioned sailing ships (the other being the *USS Constitution*). There are many aspects involving Coast Guard missions which are of great interest to divers, and *DNN* is looking forward to reeling in an in-depth feature article in a future edition! *Semper Paratus, Always Ready!*

Woods Hole is a sleepy village on Cape Cod, Massachusetts - but it has a resident with global impact. The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution scientific team and crew aboard the mighty, state-of-the-art scientific research vessel *R/V Neil Armstrong* participated in FW-NYC-'17. The tour of the ship and science labs aboard held visitors spellbound -- and *DNN* will definitely cover this in depth in a following issue!



The Navy's Stewards of the Sea were on hand, with the mission of extending/expanding the US Navy's environmental advocacy with many of their innovative solutions. This team operates worldwide and ensures that maximum environmental friendliness is the rule of the fleet and in littoral areas as well. One small but important example...we all remember the conversation Dustin Hoffman had in his breakthrough film *The Graduate*. "One word... PLASTICS!". Yes, plastics have improved the lives of billions of people on Earth, but plastics can be deadly to marine life. So, what does this have to do with the Navy? Imagine an aircraft carrier with over 5,000 officer and crew – that is a lot of plastics. Imagine dumping all that overboard in weighted bundles... No way! Under the leadership

of *Stewards of the Sea* solutions, those plastics are compressed/compacted, stored and brought ashore for environmentally-friendly disposal. *Bravo Zulu to the Navy!* There is a very direct line between safeguarding migrating whales against shipping strikes off the Eastern seaboard and the work of *Navy Stewards*, combined with the whale migration monitoring/analysis conducted by the Navy-owned *R/V Neil Armstrong* and the Woods Hole scientists. The collaboration is manifest and critical, and points the way for commercial shipping lines to follow suit to avoid maiming/killing migrating whales. For a fuller discussion of *Stewards'* solutions, please visit <https://www.facebook.com/USNavyStewardsoftheSea>. *DNN* also met with green mascot Stewie,



who was top side at FW! Stewie is a previously-unknown species of turtle which is human in size, walks upright on its two hind legs, and has a distinctive pattern on its shell which remarkably closely resembles a stylized map of the Americas, Europe and Africa! *DNN* will do a separate account of the Navy's *Stewards of the Sea* initiative in a future issue, in order to highlight the unique and forceful environmental leadership and advocacy of this Navy team. *DNN* and the scuba diving community extend heartfelt congratulations for their mission of environmental oversight and solutions for marine environmental

protection.

The Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) caught our eye during FW-NYC-'17. Headquartered on the Washington Navy Yard in D.C. their mission is to serve as the Navy's institutional memory by preserving and extending the power of US Navy history and heritage for future generations. Through NHHC's work, Sailors and all interested parties can learn of the valor and excellence of naval units throughout U.S. history, and leverage that understanding to inform future operations and war-fighting capabilities. During my visit, I learned that technology changes, but human ingenuity/insight/ and our Sailor's ability to exploit new technologies to affect best advantage of circumstances in operations and combat remains *the* crucial



component of our Navy's success. There is nothing new under the sun, and past successes and failures have their progeny in the future; post-incident reviews can create positive corrective tactics and strategies. So many examples of this immediately come to mind, but which are out of scope for this article! NHHC produces publications and maintains Navy wreck census, archives, and artifacts/archaeological findings as well as a national network of museums to advance their work, assist researchers and facilitate community engagement. Personnel at NHHC also provide and document their own and visitors' personal memories, since many were once Sailors which enable them to fill in the fabric of Navy life and times. Example: NHHC staffer Paul Lachance was a cook and Master Chief Petty Officer aboard CV-67 carrier *USS John F Kennedy* during her visit to FW-NYC-1990 (*DNN* toured JFK at FW that year). Lachance reminisced on that visit and mentioned NYrs are more welcoming today! As a NY'er, it was great to hear that we are better hosts now! To learn more about

NHHC and our Navy's history, please visit www.history.navy.mil.

U.S. Navy divers from Underwater Construction Team One, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group Two, and Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit Two participated in Fleet Week New York. When thinking of Navy divers you can refer to the 2000 film *Men of Honor* which many of us have seen, in which Cuba Gooding starred



as Carl Brashear). Divers on each team get similar training (although advanced training branches off to respective specialties), and each can pinch hit for each other - up to a point. However, Navy divers have unique, advanced skills - as do the Seabees. The Navy Public Affairs Officer for FL-NYC-'17 earned *DNN's* heartfelt gratitude by setting us interview two divers, both Navy Master Divers - the highest achievement in the world of Navy diving! *DNN* spoke at length on different occasions at both Times Square and LSP with Navy Master Diver Chief Josh Baker of Clarkston, Michigan (population 882) and Seabee Master Diver Chief Brian Strantz from Monticello, Indiana (population 5,300) who generously shared their insights and personal leadership experiences.

Navy Seabees are celebrating their 75th anniversary! Some of us are familiar with the 1944 film *Fighting Seabees*, a fictional account of Seabee John Wayne and his commanding Navy officer Dennis O'Keefe, both of whom fight not only the Imperial Japanese in WWII, but also each other -- for the affections of beautiful Susan Hayward! The storyline is loosely connected to the construction and defense of Henderson Field in the Solomon Islands, specifically Guadalcanal. John Wayne arms his construction battalion with pilfered weapons in order that they can defend themselves against marauding Japanese. The interesting observation about the film is that it *does highlight* some important themes of the Seabees on the 75th anniversary. Guadalcanal was pivotal to US success in WWII in the Pacific because of

Henderson Field, a remote airstrip for fighters and bombers to use in strikes against Japanese forces throughout the area. Guadalcanal thus was an 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' and as such, necessary to hold



to the death lest the Japanese take it back. The Seabees played a crucial role securing and maintaining this important stronghold, so in that respect the film is accurate. The Seabees motto is "*We Build, We Fight*" - consistent with the film! The Seabees construction prowess is legendary across the world; partner nations recognize the critical contribution that Seabees can deliver and welcome their offer of assistance in disasters. The Seabees slogan is 'CAN DO', and their tag line is "*the impossible just takes a little longer*". Seabees are always ready to roll up their sleeves, fire up their bulldozers and generators, and form up with other agencies and partner nations to get the job done.

Seabees are not just in reserve areas building ammunition depots, bridges and commissaries. They are frequently in harm's way, often first on the scene to do site surveys, build firebase defensive earthworks, stabilize structures and begin construction in forward

deployments. Seabees' abilities on crew-served weapons like light and heavy machine guns and mortars are legendary with the Marines with whom they train. And those skills get into action, along with valor in combat. Take the case of 1966 Vietnam War Medal Of Honor recipient Seabee Construction Mechanic 3rd Class Marvin Shields. Shields was located with ten Seabees and other U.S. forces at an isolated Special Forces base at Dong Xoai, Vietnam, approximately 50 miles north of the capital city of Saigon, which was attacked and eventually overrun by 3,000 Vietcong regulars. In the battle, Shields carried ammunition to forward positions under fire, was wounded several times, carried a wounded officer to a safer position in the compound, and assisted a lieutenant in successfully destroying a dangerous enemy machine gun position, during which action he was mortally wounded.



Despite being evacuated, he died from multiple wounds. Shields was awarded the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry. During FW-NYC-'17, Strantz related to *DNN* that Seabees have also been on the front line in the war against terrorism. He recalled the bravery of Robert Stetham, who was posthumously promoted to master chief construction man.

Stetham was a Seabee diver and was on a commercial TWA airliner which was hijacked by Hezbollah terrorists in Beirut Airport. As a member of U.S. Armed Services, he was selected by the terrorists, beaten, tortured and murdered. Passengers recount his steadfast devotion to duty and honor during his ordeal. Seabees build walls, and Stetham was a stone wall of defense for America.

Seabees also conduct domestic and international disaster relief and infrastructure development. During disasters, Seabees stand by to assist – so if a state governor declares an emergency in his or her state, the Seabees, when tasked, will deploy for construction/rebuild assistance and will collaborate with local authorities having jurisdiction and perform all duties as required.



During overseas disasters (i.e. floods, tsunamis, earthquakes or other natural disasters) the Seabees are available to render assistance upon request by the host government. Seabees (and Seabee and Navy divers) will do whatever is requested to assist.

And New Yorkers will always be grateful to the U.S. Navy and Seabees for their assistance during Superstorm Sandy in 2012. Baker was embarked aboard USS Bataan (LHD 5) (sister ship to USS Kearsarge) during relief operations for the greater NY metro area. His eyes lit up like on afterburners talking about the disaster relief work that he and his Seabee counterparts conducted in the NYC area after Sandy.

In the spirit of doing “whatever it takes”, Navy divers pumped water out of flooded homes and structures, while Seabees used bulldozers to repair/regrade access areas in hard-hit Breezy Point, Queens and in Rockaway Beach, Brooklyn.

Other operations in the NYC area included dewatering the World Trade Center memorial area; repairing the Coast Guard station at Sandy Hook, NJ; clearing hazardous debris from New Jersey shore areas; conducted assessments and pier repairs among others. To read more, here is a NavyLive blog posting that summarizes Navy operations in support of Hurricane Sandy:<http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2012/11/06/summary-of-navy-support-for-hurricane-sandy-relief-efforts-nov-6-2012/>. To learn about the Navy’s disaster response training and medical/humanitarian missions in Guatemala, Honduras, and other Latin American partner countries, visit <http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2017/03/09/continuing-promise-2017-special-report/>.

The Marines embarked on USS Kearsarge were a cheerful and spirited group of men and women! DNN spent some time with Lance Corporal Christenson, who was in charge of one of the AAV’s (Assault





Amphibious Vehicle) on display. LCPL Christenson hails from Rochester, Minnesota and is intensely proud of his AAV; he tends to the care and feeding of his 'Amtrak' assiduously. He is responsible for every aspect of its operation. He knows that his unit's mission will depend on the Marines in his assault vehicle, and he takes that responsibility with good cheer and engaged conversations, but – with absolute dedication. (DNN doesn't have any idea how in great God's green Earth 25 combat-equipped Marines can actually *fit* in an AAV, but where there's a will, there is a way. This DNN reporter almost got stuck just getting into the commander's position. The extrication of same would have been a humorous human-interest story!) The LCAC (Landing Craft Air Cushion) is an amazing military hovercraft capable of carrying troops, vehicles and even M1 Abrams main battle tanks in amphibious operations. The LCAC's utility would have been proven so many times in Marine combat history, especially in WWII with all the amphibious operations through the central Pacific. (DNN would have loved to have had a spin around Manhattan harbor in that rig. Maybe next time. The team on the M777

artillery on display had a definite choreography built around the operation of their howitzer, and their energetic cadence calls serving the weapon attracted a lot of visitor attention! We newbies couldn't actually *understand* the commands and status the crew were calling out, but that didn't matter, because *they* knew, and they have definitely mastered their system to a fare-thee-well with utmost efficiency, effectiveness and perfection.

You need 155mm ordnance downrange fast and right on target? You call on this Marine team! Similarly, for the Marine team of LCPLs Cuevasmejias, Meinema and Ororio serving the formidable 120mm mortar which will quickly mean a very bad day for the enemy. 'Every Marine a rifleman', and the Marines were proud to explain the many weapons systems they live with, which make it all happen. The Marines are all about combat resiliency and effectiveness, and a broken component single point of failure in the field now doesn't *have to be a show stopper anymore!* Why? Because as LCPL Nixon explained, the Marines are experimenting with 3d printing of components in the field, which can produce high tensile strength plastic components on demand in the field. *Semper Fi* Marines!



Marines were also on scene in force at Liberty State Park in New Jersey, showcasing their gear and vehicles, and overseeing physical fitness stations! It was inspiring to see the shared





sense of mission and community between the NY and NJ firefighters, Police Departments and the Marines. The Marines and sailors felt the cops and firemen were rock stars, and it was reciprocal. When all is said and done, the rest of us are and remain indebted to those groups of men and women who have our back, whether it is around the corner or across the world - to the shores of Tripoli. Lt. Col. Jason Stubbs (Executive Officer commanding the Marines embarked on *USS Kearsarge*) and Capt. Larry Getz, commanding officer, *USS Kearsarge*, can be very proud of the performance of the Marines and sailors of FW-NYC-'17, who all were so engaging, hospitable, well-spoken, brimming with enthusiasm for their Service and for their mission, and who were dedicated to making their NYC and NJ visitors feel welcome. It was inspiring meeting them and knowing they have our back, and it was an honor for the Marines and sailors selected to participate in FW -- their commanders chose with excellence.

During *DNN's* interviews at FW-NYC-'17, *shoals* of questions surfaced and were answered by Baker and Strantz. We'll include some of the highlights below:

Navy Diving Missions, Training, 'Day in the Life'

So, what is the difference between a Navy diver and a Seabee diver? Initially, not much. Divers from all services must complete dive training at the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center in Panama City Beach, Florida (the largest dive training facility in the world), including Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Army, Medical Corps, Coast Guard and even divers from partner nations <http://www.netc.navy.mil/centers/ceneodive/ndstc/>.

This is where divers exhaustively train in the basics of diving the tables, decompression obligations, hand signal communications, gases, preparing to dive, open circuit and rebreather gear, situational assessment, navigation (day and night), rescue diving, intensive fitness training, open water swimming and all those disciplines we



know and strive to master. And the legends, culture of excellence and lore of the famous Ironmen (hardhat divers, among them Carl Brashear) are promulgated. It is here where the 'Titans of Neptune' forge their life-long bonds to each other, to the mission, and to the diving they love.



The different services then each have their own individual training specialties and curricula. Each Service diving activity has its own specific dangers - which are compounded with the inherently risky business of being underwater - with all that entails. **For the Navy diver**, the tasks are locating/retrieving wreckage, explosives/ordnance disposal, ship repair, assistance with underwater construction/demolition, search and rescue, and supporting Navy special operations. **Seabees on the other hand** will train intensively with Marines on crew-served weapons such as light and heavy machine guns and mortars, because their duties include land-based missions which will make Seabees more likely than ship-based Navy divers to engage enemy forces on land. The Seabees mission scope encompasses piers/wharves/bridges/pipelines/moorings (top side and underwater), roads, logistics facilities, airfields construction and maintenance, building ammunition depots, teaming up with other Armed Services construction units and those of partner nations, and rebuilding civilian education and public services infrastructure.



Diving operations typically involve a diving supervisor who is underwater with his team of divers, keeping tabs on each member of the team. The supervisors help out as necessary resolving situations and avoiding added risk factors such as entanglement, gear issues, and everything that Murphy dishes out. Topping monitoring includes voice communications to the team regarding mission progress, as well as monitoring the status of the topside power generators when used, divers' air/gas remaining, rate of air/gas consumption, time elapsed, depth, and other

metrics. *But before any diver enters the water*, the dive supervisors conduct exhaustive examination of their divers' gear, checking connections, securing adjustments, and checking for leaks. Divers also check each other; dive safety is paramount and there are multiple layers of safety checking before anyone gets wet and after for that matter. In consideration of their crucial role, dive supervisors are rigorously selected and personally certified by a team of Master Divers before they are assigned this role.

The Navy is known for pioneering dive tables to govern decompression obligations for initial and repetitive dives. But aren't dive tables antiquated in this day and age with incredibly sophisticated dive computers? Do Navy divers have to even bother with tables these days? "It depends" and 'Yes' and 'No' is the response



from the diving team. In dive school Navy divers are trained and drilled exhaustively in dive table-directed diving, in order that compliance with Navy guidelines burn into their DNA. After all, what would happen if the diver's dive computer's firmware malfunctioned or the computer was damaged during a salvage dive inside a wreck? On the other hand, dive computers do offer welcome advantages to maximize bottom time, and dynamically compensate for continual movement up and down in the water column, which is frequently required for ship repair/maintenance dives.

Use of rebreathers further mitigates towards use of dive computers to maximize dive times. The Navy is all about advanced technology, and other applications of technologies are under evaluation by Navy divers; these include heads-up displays inside their hardhat helmets which reduces/eliminates the need for visual reindexing, and infrared imaging systems which has the potential of radically changing night diving and blackwater dive operations. Imagine a system similar to 'night vision' – only underwater! Combine that with Bluetooth voice and telemetry connectivity "in excess of 50 feet" and this is a radical revisioning/expansion of capabilities. Many public safety divers and even firemen can benefit from variations of this technology so, gangway, the Navy is on it!

Master divers are the pinnacle of Navy diving and have the ultimate responsibility for the safety of the divers and mission status. In addition to continually assessing procedures and overseeing the condition/testing/certification of all the equipment for (and training of) their divers and directing the dive supervisors, MD's must anticipate "what could go wrong, how do we prevent/mitigate/respond to the mission risks". Their analysis covers not *just* underwater, but what has to happen topside if the mission or divers run into trouble. They drill through vacant assumptions and stay many steps ahead of every possible situation. They advocate for their divers with Navy brass; if a mission is too dangerous, they will scrub the mission. MD's decide which of their divers get promoted for further duties (and which do not). Safety and effectiveness for the team is the determining factor. MD's also oversee dive medicine procedures/casualty control ('where is the nearest chamber and *how* are we going to get an injured diver there?'); be experts at search and rescue operations; conduct effective port security; lead post-incident reviews; be expert in all aspects of underwater construction/salvage operations; manage saturation dives - and no doubt many other weighty responsibilities!

Master Divers' Experiences

DNN asked Master Divers Baker and Strantz what their ***most challenging and emotionally trying situations*** had been. Baker recalled that controlling stress was critical during the intensive, rigorous peer review by other MD's during the MD selection process. Further stress was created because of the trust and confidence placed in the candidate; he did not want to let down those who had gone to bat for him to be a candidate for MD. Ten years or more of their lives were on the line in front of that Review Board.

Strantz had similar recollections, and also mentioned the six-hour *all-essay* examinations the MD's had to endure before being selected as MD's (talk about writer's cramp!).



DNN also asked Strantz and Baker what their ***proudest mission accomplishments and successes were***. The answers were very revealing. Strantz said that his best moment was when his divers get promoted. Baker said when he saw his divers completing increasingly complex tasks with efficiency, effectiveness and safety. *This highlights that MD's must exhibit not only superior diving technical skills mastering all aspects of the missions, but must also possess personal ethics, strength of character, passion for the Navy mission and most importantly leadership of their divers.*

DNN asked what was the ***'most dangerous mission'*** the chief had been on. Strantz politely advised that *each and every* mission is potentially dangerous. There *is* no 'routine' dive. So, this was a poor question and the wrong question. And of course, Strantz is absolutely right. No diver should ever let their guard down for a nanosecond. Difficult situations can develop and start compounding in an instant with the potential for bad outcomes. Whether it is sudden unexpected equipment failure, configuration, procedural or human error, miscommunications, shifting debris, hazmat, unstable ordnance... the list goes on and on. Every mission has unique risk factors - but the overriding principle is 'prepare for the worst case' and 'plan the work and work the plan -- to completion'.

Another duty taken on by MDs is to consult with public safety divers. Baker advised that master divers are called upon to assist local law enforcement and other public safety divers with procedure assessment, situation management skills, and to offer the benefit of their experience. Fire departments, state police and law enforcement all gain invaluable knowledge to complete their missions resulting from the discerning peer-to-peer assessment and recommendations resulting from these formal and informal assessments. In this way, MD's are keeping us *all* safer due to their work with public safety personnel!

DNN asked Baker and Strantz if they had any recommendations for diving books. Strantz shot back with *Shadow Divers* by Robert Kurson about German submarine U869 which Strantz called 'spellbinding'. Both chiefs had other suggestions, and these are now on the DNN reading list! *Descent Into Darkness* is one, which relates the desperate attempts by hardhat divers after the Pearl Harbor attack to save sailors trapped inside their capsized and sunken ships. *76 Hours: The Invasion of Tarawa* was another recommendation, which discusses the American invasion of Tarawa and the role of the combat engineers/Seabees in that action. Naturally, DNN had return recommendations for reading, which peaked the MDs' interest, among them *Mystery of the Last Olympian* (Richie Kohler) *Where Divers Dare* (Randall Peffer) and of course, *The Last Dive* (Bernie Chowdhury).



When asked if the MD's had any comments for the Sea Services veterans who are scuba divers and among the readers of *DNN*, both MD's offered a hearty *HOOYAH*, thanked them for their service, and affirmed how much they appreciated the foundation these veterans built, and the solid shoulders upon which today's Navy now stands in completing their worldwide mission of keeping the sea lanes friendly to the world, protecting American interests, and undertaking humanitarian operations globally.



DNN wanted to find out a little more about our subject Master Diver Chiefs! I asked each how they got into this diving gig. Chief Brian Strantz hails from Monticello, Indiana, a small rural farming town. (Lots of ocean around there!) He decided to join up, and picked the Navy. The recruiter asked him what he did. He said he was a farmer. That didn't affect any direct hits, but when he also said he did part-time construction work... BINGO – Seabees! Then one day he was in Kuwait, working on a Seabee construction project with an Air Force construction team and a Kuwaiti construction firm, and heard explosions coming from the water. Underwater demolitions. "Who is doing that?" "The Seabees divers are broadening/deepening the channel" "That's what I want to do!" And the rest is history. Baker also had a lot of ocean around him in Clarkston, Michigan. After Baker joined the Navy he had a number of entry-level roles, and was ultimately assigned to cryptology. This is the elite, most thinking-intensive team in the Navy with critical role in deciphering signal intelligence. But Baker wanted to get the lead out, so he transferred from one elite to another – and became a U.S. Navy Diver! Again, the rest is history. When asked about amazing underwater experiences and exotic marine life underwater, Strantz talked about diving in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, in particular on assignment diving the Great Blue Hole in Belize. Baker recalled having a hair-raising run-in with a large eel which had claimed the external grating on a submarine as its own turf. Baker was assigned to clear the grating, but the eel was not entirely agreeable. Baker survived the encounter, as did the eel, but with some ruffled denticles. Of course, Navy divers are not on sight-seeing missions down there to observe sea life, and are always task-oriented.

Divers at Fleet Week NYC 2017

The U.S. Navy and Navy Seabees installed their portable dive tank in NYC's Times Square and at LSP. Visitors and their children flocked to the dive tanks at both locations to come take a closer look! Some of the most heart-warming moments of FW-NYC-'17 occurred at the dive tank exhibit, where Navy divers played tic-tac-toe with kids who came to marvel at the strange but pretty, bright yellow hardhat helmets on the divers. Some of these divers are Dads themselves - but even those who weren't – *all* showed such great joy and warmth interacting with the kids. It was heart-warming to see!



Navy divers also dived in Brooklyn's Coney Island Aquarium, where diving is normally permitted only for tank maintenance/repair. I understood from Baker and Strantz that extended negotiations with the Aquarium were required to dive there. One question came to mind – the divers were wearing their own wetsuits with warmed water, covered by their Navy Working Uniform, Type 3. Given that their fatigues might be chemically-treated, *DNN* wondered why aquarium officials would permit diving with uniforms, given that contaminants potentially harmful for the fish might be introduced. In the event, the uniforms were cleaned, dried and certified as inert and harmless for the fish, and the dive proceeded. *DNN* was not there at the Coney Island Aquarium, but from the social media postings it looked like a splendid time was had by all!

With the above in mind, there are many highly skilled civilian divers who have Navy Master Diver level skills. Importantly however, these are for the most part *individuals*. U.S. Navy divers represent an *integrated group* and team of divers who are without a doubt: *the best dive team in the world*. May all Navy divers always complete all missions successfully, and return home to family, friends, community and their comrades.

Finally, a big shout out to the US Navy Atlantic Fleet Public Affairs team, with special hats-off to Lt. Commander Cragg for her assistance in setting up interviews for *DNN*. Navy Atlantic Fleet PAO are the best in the business! NYC was sad to see all the gallant crews and sleek ships 'haze gray and underway' egressing NYC harbor, but... **Bravo Zulu!** – Job well done – to the US Navy, Coast Guards and Marines --- and NYC just can't wait to welcome all again-- next year!

