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News Release #21-14

Feb 27, 2014

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Navy's Newest Department Heads introduced to Fleet

NEWPORT, R.I. – The Surface Warfare Officers School (SWOS) announced the graduation of Department Head Class 225 Feb. 27, with 58 Surface Warfare Officers receiving their certificates of completion in the Adm. Michael G. Mullen Auditorium.

The class completed the 27-week course, designed to prepare officers for duty as chief engineers, combat systems and weapons officers, operations officers on all classes of ships and as first lieutenants on amphibious ships.

The course is divided into two major subdivisions - Tactical Action Officer (TAO), which focuses on areas such as undersea warfare, air defense, and surface warfare, and Operations, Readiness, Training, and Engineering (ORTE), which explores the specifics of each student's prospective job assignments.

"The duties and responsibilities of the shipboard department head are significant and reflect a great degree of authority," said Capt. Richard A. Brown, SWOS commanding officer. "The length of the course is indicative of the investment the Navy has made in the future readiness of the students and in their importance to the mission of the ship. A significant graduation ceremony is merited to acknowledge these facts and to note each officer's passage from student to ship's officer."

The guest of honor for the ceremony, Rear Adm. Pete Gumataotao, commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic (COMNAVSURFLANT), praised the graduates on this major achievement and thanked their families and friends for witnessing the event.

“Your attitudes as department heads, first and foremost, will be observable and reflected by your Sailors,” said Gumataotao. “Moreover, your attitudes are an individual decision and not to be blamed on anyone else. I urge you to develop a deliberate and questioning attitude that ensures safe operations and training. I implore each of you to leave your new commands better than you found them when you reported on board.”

Lt. Will Ashley, prospective combat systems officer for USS Boxer (LHD 4) received the Arleigh Burke Award for the graduate recognized by classmates as the individual possessing the strongest leadership, industry and perseverance; best exemplifying the fighting spirit of Admiral Burke's famous squadron, the ‘Little Beavers’ – Destroyer Squadron 23.

When asked for a comment on his award, Ashley said, “Honestly, It’s not about one person, but the shared experiences of everyone here. It’s about each person helping one another out. If you treat everyone as a leader, you can just build off of that.”

Ashley also received the City of Newport Award for demonstrating the highest qualities of professionalism and leadership, as reflected by his overall contributions to Class 225.

Lt. Kevin Pilcher, Lt. Jason Copare, and Lt. John Woodson were also recognized during the ceremony. Pilcher, the prospective chief engineer for MCM Crew Avenger, earned the Top Gunner award for having the highest overall grade point average for the tactical action officer portion of the

course. Copare received the Newport Navy League award for academic excellence as the top graduate for department head class 225, and will serve as operations officer on USS Oscar Austin (DDG 79). Woodson, prospective chief engineer on USS Tortuga (LSD 46), earned the Top Snipe award for having the highest overall grade point average for the engineering portion of the course.

After more than 50 years, the Department Head course remains the flagship course at SWOS. Approximately 275 students attend the course each year.

SWOS is headquartered in Newport, R.I. and oversees nine learning sites, which provide more than 1,000 courses a year to more than 67,000 Sailors.

SWOS uses a mix of blended-learning techniques comprised of instructor-led classes, hands-on labs, simulation and computer-based training. Courses include specialized training supporting all enlisted engineering ratings, and Surface Warfare Officers at every level. Building maritime partnerships, the command also provides training to many international students.

For more information about Surface Warfare Officers School, visit <https://www.netc.navy.mil/centers/swos/>.

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To learn more about the Naval Education and Training Command, visit <https://www.netc.navy.mil>.

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