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Navy's 'Copperhead' trains future EOD technicians

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – The Navy's senior Master Diver (MDV) is helping to train future generations of EOD Technicians at the Naval School of Explosive Ordnance Disposal (NAVSCOLEOD).

Master Chief Navy Diver Eric Holliday, Command MDV at NAVSCOLEOD is the Navy's "Copperhead," a title held by the U.S. Navy Diver (ND) who has been a MDV the longest. The term 'Copperhead' originates from the copper helmet of the Mark V dive suit, a familiar symbol representing deep-sea divers, even though its use was discontinued in the early 1980s.

Holliday currently works at the Underwater Ordnance division (UOD) at NAVSCOLEOD, where he helps to train students and their instructors.

"One of the many positive impacts MDV has had in UOD is the amount of realism and relevance he brings during the course of training students in diving operations," said Lt. Jeffrey Schultz, UOD division officer. "Whether an instructor is qualifying as a new or prior diving supervisor, anyone present during the training MDV conducts comes out with not only a better understanding of the dive evolution, but also a new-found respect for the inherent risks Navy Divers encounter every day."

Holliday joined the Navy in February 1984, and spent his first year attending Interior Communications Electrician (IC) "A" School. He then reported to the USS Moinester (FF 1097), a Knox-class frigate, for his first duty station.

"When I first joined the Navy, standing duty on the Moinester, I didn't like it," said Holliday. "I didn't realize there was a dive program when I joined, so I spent a year in the Navy, and then attended dive school."

Holliday left the Moinester to attend dive school and became a U.S. Navy Diver in August 1985.

"When I became a diver, things got better and my views on everything changed," said Holliday. "I found a sense of camaraderie in the dive community."

It has proven enough of a change for Holliday to continue on with his Navy career for 30 years.

Holliday became a Master Diver in 1995, and succeeded Master Chief Navy Diver Gary Furr as the Copperhead. Furr, former Command Master Diver of the Naval EOD Technology Division in Indian Head, Md. retired in 2012.

"We met for lunch at a very informal ceremony when he passed the title to me," said Holliday.

Throughout his nearly 30 years in the Navy, Holliday has been stationed around the world, but of all his duty stations, his favorite place was Guam.

"Guam is great – the water is very clear to dive in," said Holliday. "During the 1990s, I was stationed at U.S. Navy Ship Repair Facility and at Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Marianas, where I performed a lot of ship's husbandry and inspections. We also operated the busiest recompression chamber in the Navy."

While in Guam, Holliday received the Ancient Order of the Chamori Award, which is the highest award that can be given to a non-Guamanian. The award was presented for Holiday's assistance to local divers with the recompression chamber.

"In Guam, there were a lot of civilian divers, and we treated them when they received dive-related injuries," said Holliday. "I probably treated four-to-five hundred patients throughout my career. Treating someone in the chamber and bringing them back from being unconscious is very rewarding. Afterward, they stand up and shake your hand. There's nothing like that."

Following his years in Guam, Holliday transferred to commands in Puerto Rico and Bahrain, then on to Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center (NDSTC), followed by a set of orders to the Center for EOD and Diving, where he helped to create the ND Enlisted Learning and Development Road Map (LaDR), updated the ND Occupational Standards, helped to write ND E4-E7 advancement exams and updated the 1st Class Diver and 2nd Class Diver curricula.

"He made an immediate impact on NDSTC," said Master Chief Navy Diver Louis Deflice, MDV at Commander Submarine Development Squadron Five, Silverdale, Wash. "As the training department MDV, he was tasked with updating course curriculum to reflect the largest change to the Navy Diving manual in decades. The entire curriculum for half a dozen high-risk diving courses had to basically be rewritten."

Holliday was also responsible for the implementation of the changes throughout the NDSTC training department, to include the conversion of making Navy Diver its own rate.

"NDSTC officially made the transition from a 'training command' to a Navy 'A' School, which presented huge challenges never anticipated at the

command," said Deflice. "Through it all, Holliday managed to expertly guide the instructors and training department over hurdle after hurdle. I honestly don't know anyone else capable of such accomplishments while simultaneously ensuring his training department was training and putting out such highly skilled Navy Divers."

Holliday has also helped overhaul the Diving Salvage Warfare Specialist (DSWS) Personnel Qualification Standards (PQS), which is now known as the Military Diver PQS, and made it applicable to all services.

But above all the awards received and the changes he has helped to make, he believes the most rewarding parts of his job have been working with Sailors.

"My time as an instructor and instructor trainer have been some of the best parts of my time in the Navy; helping my subordinates and my replacements to achieve what I've achieved," said Holliday. "It's been a great career - the people, the friends I've made, the camaraderie, the job itself."

"He has made a huge impact on my life both personally and professionally," added Deflice. "I was a young chief when I worked for him and he taught me more about leadership, ethics and the importance of standards than anyone before or since. He was, and remains, my mentor and role model. I consider myself very fortunate to have been trained by Master Diver Holliday and I proudly try to teach my men what he has taught me."

NAVSCOLEOD, located on Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. provides high-risk, specialized, basic and advanced EOD training to more than 2,100 U.S. and partner nation military and selected U.S. government personnel each year.

For more information on the Naval School of Explosive Ordnance Disposal, visit the NAVSCOLEOD website:

<https://www.netc.navy.mil/centers/ceneoddive/eods/>.

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

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