

THE WORLD OF THE DIVER

YOU HAVE BEEN alone in an absolutely dark room, not able to see your hand before your face, but have you ever entered an "Alice Through the Looking Glass" world of enchantment, full of sparkling, strange, yet wonderful things? Add to these sensations the magic phenomena of water and you share the experience of every naval clearance diver, sometimes frightening and lonely, at other times a private paradise. It is this ability of a man to accept such conditions: freezing water, immersion in soft mud, uncomfortable to an nth degree; or gliding easily through clear warm sea water and seeing the wonders of underwater life, that make a successful clearance diver.

The RCN opened its own Diving Training Section in the TAS School, Stadacona, just over a year ago. Since then, from approximately 150 men, about 40 have qualified as clearance divers in various trade groups and as CD (Ships). Our CD (Ships) are men from any branch, stewards, shipwrights, sick bay personnel. They are always an interesting class to train, and when equipment is easier to obtain they will be a tremendous asset to their captains.

Every fully qualified clearance diver in the RCN is capable of using any type of diving equipment yet devised, from the valuable standard dress, weighting 200 pounds and using compressed air pumped down to him, to the more romantic "self contained" types of equipment.

The aqua lung and the naval "frogmen" sets are self-contained units that allow a person to literally fly through underwater space by a mere flip of the flipper, or to stay motionless at any depth without effort. This is comparable to the one-man helicopter device strapped to a future birdman's back; it is not a matter of swimming so much as flying. A miracle took place when experts such as Cousteau, Gagan, Hedges, Hass and Crabbe taught men to swim underwater. In the Navy one can enjoy the miracle and be paid to perform it.

Nevertheless, much hard work and certain natural qualities are needed before a 16-week course produces a new clearance diver. A man with a good sense of responsibility, under the age of 25, must have passed the naval swimming test, and be able to pass a "diving medical" in which particular attention is paid to the heart, chest, ears and sinuses. "Young and healthy" might sum it up, with no "afraid of the dark" tendencies.

The work a diver has to tackle includes salvage work, jetty and other underwater surveys, ship's bottom inspection, the removal and fitting of A/S domes, clearing screws, recovering almost any article. He learns to weld underwater and to become expert at surface and below-the-surface demolitions. Last but not most important he is a clearance expert, trained to find and render safe underwater enemy mines or other infernal machines and also to deal with bomb disposal problems. In peace or war the diver is always busy.

Living underwater is not normal for a human and "divers' ailments" are many. However, the diver is trained to look after himself and his fellows in avoiding dangers and discomforts. The adventure and fun of just being underwater compensates for any risk. In the service, with the diving regulations in force, diving is safer than crossing the street.

There is still much to be learned about living below the surface and every "dip" a diver takes helps research. But development of technique and equipment is on a par with the lightning growth of aviation science, and the RCN diver is becoming an increasingly important member of the service.—(Contrib.)