

New "Hat" Caps Ship's Celebration

5 December 2013

USS STETHEM (DDG 63) celebrated the birthdate of its namesake, SW2-DV Robert Stethem, 16 November 2013 in Yokasuka, Japan. The celebration included a cake cutting ceremony presided by STETHEM's Commanding Officer, CDR Paul Lyons. Part of the celebration included the commemoration of a new MK V Diving Helmet provided by NAVSEA.



New MK V diving helmet commemoration at USS STETHEM's (DDG 63) birthday celebration of their namesake, Robert Stethem.

Because the ship's crew takes the legacy of Steelworker 2nd Class (Diver) Robert Stethem's bravery and honorable service to heart, they proudly display a MK V diving helmet on the quarterdeck. On a recent trip to the ship to perform an underwater hull weld repair onboard STETHEM, NAVSEA Underwater Repair Specialist, Scott Heineman, representing the Underwater Ship Husbandry Division (OOC5) of the Supervisor of Salvage and Diving, noticed the MK V hat was in pretty rough condition and in need of preservation and repairs. "The hat had a hole cut around the transceiver and the front viewport grill was missing and had broken screws. It was a poor representation of a hat that was the centerpiece for this ship" said Scott Heineman.

For reference, the MK V helmet was used for surface supplied diving in the U.S. Navy from 1916 to 1984 and represents old-school diving for many generations of Navy Divers. The MK V helmet is the basis for the Dive Pin that symbolizes achieving Navy Diver qualification today. The remaining MK V helmets in the Navy inventory are closely managed and treasured. Seeing a representative MK V helmet on the quarterdeck of USS STETHEM needing service stirred retired Master Diver Heineman to action.

After coordinating with NAVSEA OOC management back in Washington, Scott contacted NAVSEA's Emergency Ship Salvage Material (ESSM) Base Diving Maintenance Manager, Paul Shadow, also a retired Master Diver, who serves as depot level service provider for Fleet diving equipment and asked if USS STETHEM's "hat" could be serviced to make it more presentable. Once the old helmet was shipped to ESSM base in Cheatham Annex (Williamsburg, VA) and evaluated, the best solution, it was decided, was to provide a fully refurbished hat as a replacement and send it to USS STETHEM in time for the birthday celebration.

"I'm very happy and grateful to report the Mark V arrived on STETHEM and is again proudly displayed as the centerpiece to our quarterdeck where it provides a daily reminder to all Steelworkers and visitors that this is Robbie Stethem's Destroyer." said CDR Paul Lyons who thanked everyone who had a hand in getting the new helmet to them. "This event is very important to the steelworkers because it honors the ship's namesake - a Petty Officer who's legacy of honorable service and unflinching courage in the face of adversity serves as a source of pride and ethos for all of us."



Replacement MK V helmet which now resides on the Destroyer STETHEM's quarterdeck.

Robert Stethem was killed on June 15, 1985 by Hezbollah terrorists who hijacked his plane shortly after TWA flight 847 took off in Greece. The hijackers held 39 people hostage for 17 days, demanding the release of 766 Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. When their demands were not met, Stethem, a U.S. Navy Seabee and Diver, was targeted, beaten and tortured. Finally, the hijackers shot him and dumped his body onto the tarmac at the Beirut airport.

USS STETHEM, commanded by Lyons, is an Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer that operates out of Yokosuka, Japan, as part of the Navy's only permanently forward-deployed naval forces, and serves with USS GEORGE WASHINGTON (CVN-73), the Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier.

NAVSEA Supervisor of Salvage and Diving, SEA 00C, is responsible for all aspects of ocean engineering, including salvage, in-water ship repair, contracting, towing, diving safety, and equipment maintenance and procurement in the U.S. Navy.