

Divers step back in time with Mark V

By Melissa Atkinson
Editor, The Lookout

Perched on a metal crate in the centre of Maple Bay dock, LS Danny Landry had his portrait taken in a 60-year-old Mark V, the spun copper helmet, dulled by years of use, clutched to one side.

Dressed in the oversized, dry rubberized canvas suit, with weighted boots and weight belt, he looked like an astronaut.

After the photo, he was lowered 35 feet into the bay for a 15-minute walk about to experience the world of divers of long ago. No communication and a different breathing system were some of the variations he experienced.

"It was diving in an antique," he said. "The Mark V is like being in a small submarine with four windows. I found it very cool."

He was the first of eight clearance diving students from Fleet Diving Unit (Pacific) to take the plunge July 2 wearing the historic dive suit, brought out of the closet by their instructor PO2 Rob DeProy.

"It was a honour to be able to dive with that gear," said LS Pat Moulden, another clearance diving student. "We're super thankful that PO2 DeProy put that all together for us."

The dive suit was handed down to PO2 DeProy from his father, who took his son's dive class out for a similar dive many years ago.

His father was a commercial diver when the Mark V was the primary suit for deep diving.

He was on hand July 2 as the subject matter expert, and to help the students get in and out of the 200 pounds of gear.

The Canadian Navy adopted the Mark V in the early 1950s as the standard dive dress. In 1981 it was replaced with the Superlite 17B; that helmet is far lighter than its predecessor and breathes a combination of helium and oxygen.

The early equipment the students dove in is known as an "air hat" because divers need a steady free flow of air to prevent the buildup of CO2 in the helmet. LS Landry said the continuing flow of air made it

tough to hear.

To reduce fogging on the four windowpanes, LS Landry says they opened a spit-cock valve found on the outside of the helmet, which released water into the mouth to be spit on the window.

LS Moulden said the students talked all day about how diving in that gear made them feel connected to divers of 50 years ago.

In three weeks, LS Landry and the rest of his class will graduate; four are expected to stay in Esquimalt, and four, including LS Landry, will re-locate to the East Coast.

The Mark V dive was a graduation gift from PO2 DeProy.

"For us, with about a month left on the course, we all agreed that we could have no better graduation gift than this day; diving and having the same feeling as those who dove with this equipment 50 years ago," says LS Landry. "We would like to say a special thanks to PO2 DeProy for this event. It was truly an exceptional day and it will be something that we will all remember for years to come."



OS Ryan Dawe, a clearance diving student from Fleet Diving Unit (Pacific), took the plunge in a 60-year-old Mark V dive suit.