

Combat divers hold graduation ceremony underwater



Lieutenant Berry receives the top candidate award as soldiers participate in the Combat Dive Course 0022 graduation ceremonies at the base pool in CFB Gagetown.

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CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick — The base pool at CFB Gagetown was the scene of an unusual parade recently when 12 members of Combat Dive Course 0022 graduated underwater.

With the sound of regulators being checked, Canadian flags hanging in the water at the deep end and soldiers sliding into the pool, history was made.

“This is the first underwater grad parade in Canada. The last time that we can remember a grad parade being held underwater was when 4 Combat Engineer Regiment was at CFB Lahr, Germany in the early 90’s,” said Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Mann, Commandant of the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering.

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Soldiers participating in the Combat Dive Course 0022 graduation ceremony stand at attention in the pool of the Army Dive Centre.

“The parade came to be primarily out of fun,” explained WO Marc Beauregard, Sergeant-Major of Army Dive Unit. “The Colonel Commandant of the school is posted out this summer. He is the OPI of Army Diving and I wanted him to become the reviewing officer for the course. The email went forth to him and he came back with the suggestion that he would love to do it if we could do it in the water, in CABA (compressed air breathing apparatus) and he wanted a swim past instead of a march past.”

Combat divers take engineering underwater

As in any other speciality in the Canadian Forces, it takes a special kind of soldier to make a combat diver. The prerequisite for the Combat Diver Course is you must be an engineer first and you must be chosen to attend a two-week preliminary training course. The successful candidates are then off to the Fleet Diving Unit Atlantic in Halifax for six weeks where they learn to dive.

The last four weeks of the ten-week course take place in Gagetown at the Army Dive Centre where students learn engineering skills underwater, such as navigation and heavy lifting.

“The combat divers are a little different from most,” said LCol Paul Mann. “The claustrophobia, the dark water, all requires a special mindset as well as good soldier skills.”

Each member swam up to receive dive coin

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Graduating soldiers begin the swim past. The graduating class of Combat Dive Course "22 performed the swim past instead of a march past. The graduating class formed up in two ranks on the floor of the pool at the deep end. They all came to attention when the commandant took his position and took over the parade. Lieutenant Berry swam up first to receive the top candidate award and then each member swam up and was presented with a dive coin. Once everyone received their coins, the students did a swim past.

“Being such a long and hard course for us, it was fitting that we would graduate underwater,” said Sapper Ryan Waring from 1 Combat Engineer Regiment in Edmonton. “I haven’t been on a parade like this before and I don’t think that I will be on another one again. It was very special.”

Commandant becomes honorary combat diver

Prior to the graduation ceremony, LCol Mann was not a combat diver, but Capt Jeff Mahoney inducted him into the honorary ranks of the combat divers on the pool deck.

“I am very honoured and flattered because the work that these soldiers do is immense. All that I have done is help create the conditions for their success,” said LCol Mann.

After graduation, students will return to their jobs at their respective units. They now have a speciality as a combat diver and will be utilized as a diver when needed.

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