

Surface Warfare

MARCH 2025

DIGITAL FEATURE



Dive into the Reserves

Story and photos by Lt. j.g. Julián Jacobs



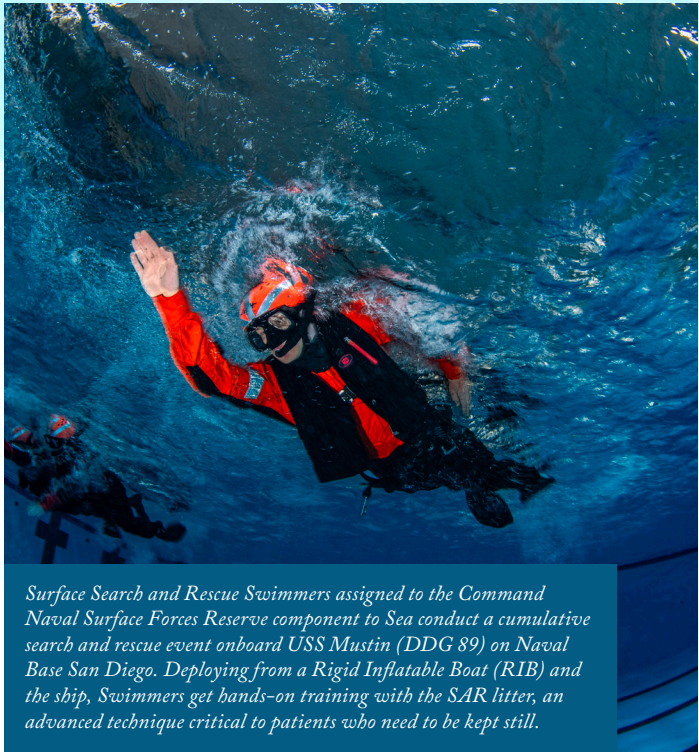
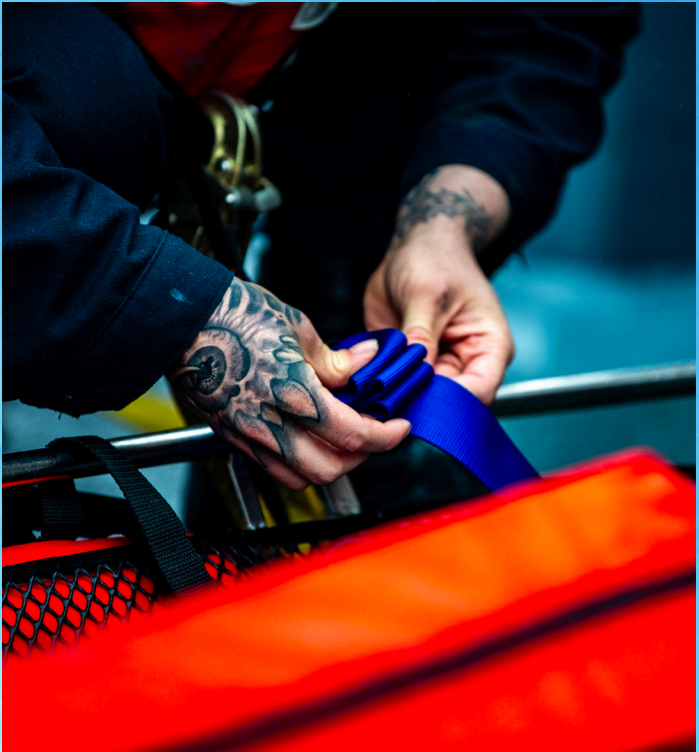
Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea, practice critical search and rescue skills at the Charles Jackson French pool on Naval Base San Diego. By perfecting skills in the pool, swimmers can have the confidence and skill to execute life-saving maneuvers at sea.

Diving into the Reserves: Reserve to Sea Surface Search and Rescue (SSAR) Swimmers prepare to help ships reach 80% surge ready goals.

Fins slice through cold water. Above the surface, an orange drysuit moves toward a swimmer in distress. Below, expert hands prepare to save a life. A week ago, this Surface Search and Rescue (SSAR) Swimmer was living his civilian life. SSAR Swimmers are essential to surface operations. As the last line of defense, they

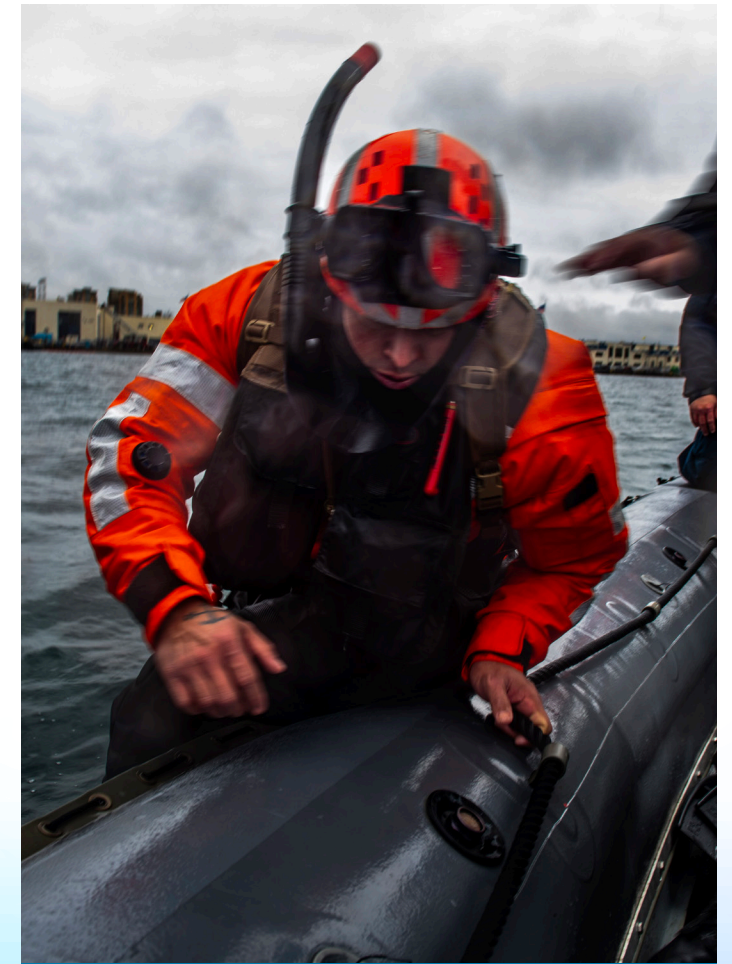
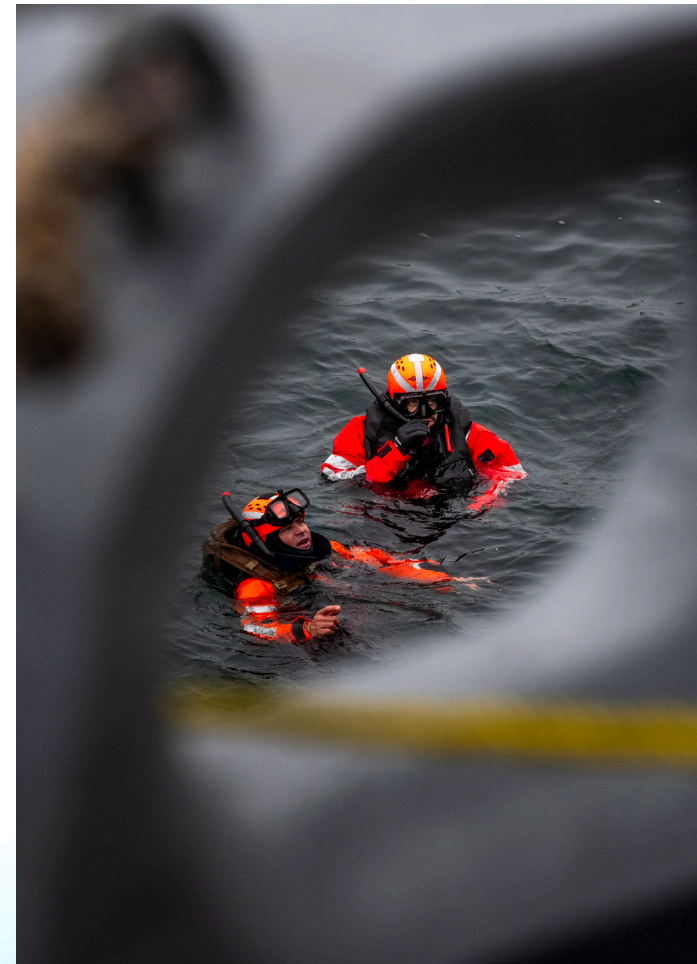
help rescue, recover, and resuscitate Sailors who have fallen outside of a ship's lifelines. A SSAR swimmer's critical role makes them a prerequisite "redline," a requirement for every surface vessel to get underway and stay underway. To meet redline standards, each ship always needs two SSAR swimmers onboard.

As the Surface Force looks to expand to 80% combat surge ready by 2027, the force will need more SSAR swimmers, ready to take on more time at sea, to provide flexibility to the fleet. How does the fleet supply this demand? Through Reserve Component to Sea (RCS) SSAR swimmers. The RCS program sends Navy Reserve Sailors to sea, filling critical manning gaps. As qualified SSAR swimmers end their time on active duty, this program allows them to maintain critical qualifications, a civilian lifestyle, and execute SSAR missions when called upon.



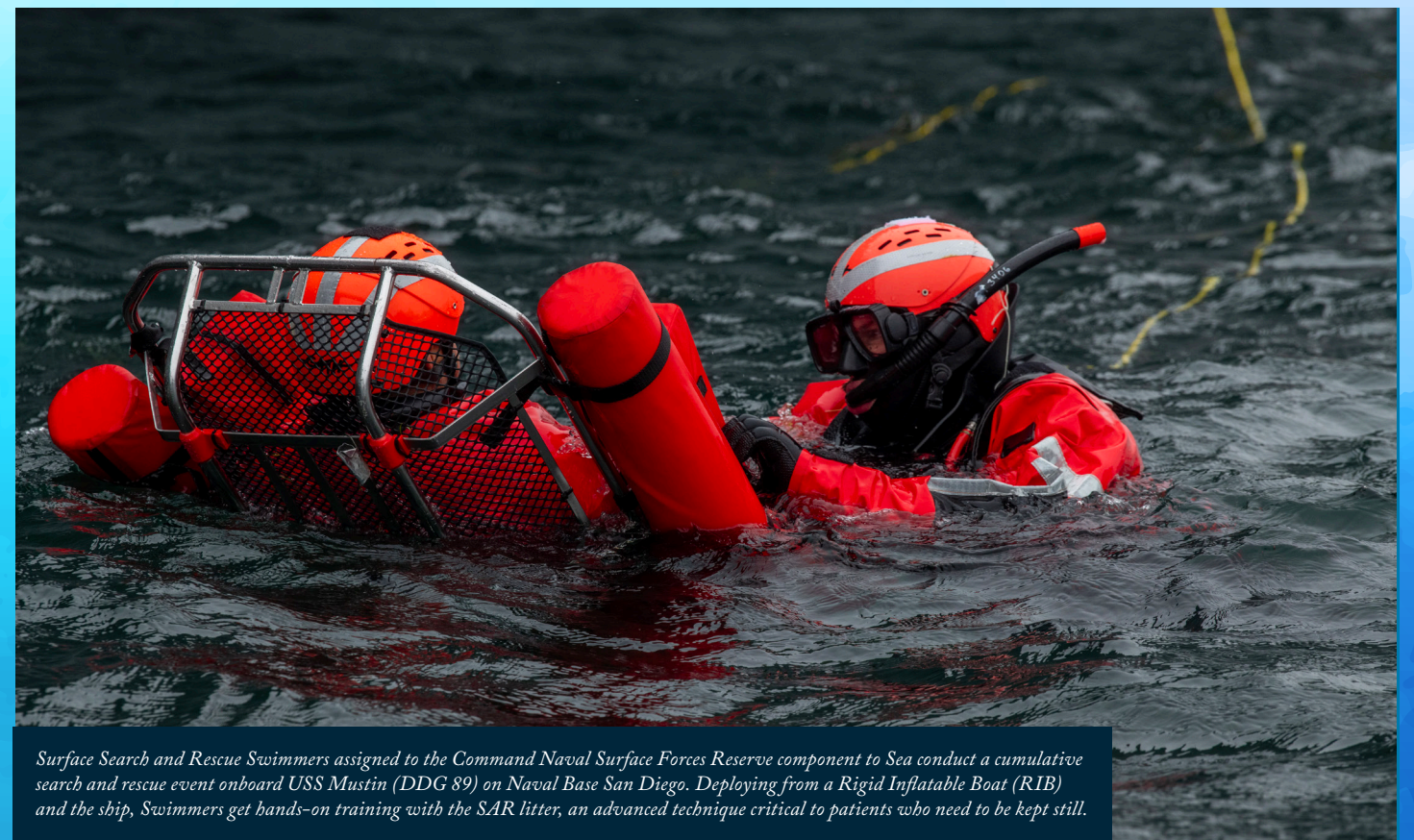
Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea conduct a cumulative search and rescue event onboard USS Mustin (DDG 89) on Naval Base San Diego. Deploying from a Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) and the ship, Swimmers get hands-on training with the SAR litter, an advanced technique critical to patients who need to be kept still.





Swimmers like Gunners Mate Second Class Robert Case enjoy that flexibility. Case was hesitant coming into the reserves, but he credits his tenure as “the most fun” he’s had in the Navy. As a full-time student at the University of Auburn, studying Wildlife Enterprise Management, Case believes that “the reserves are what you make of it,” with extended service setting Sailors up professionally and financially. Case notes that the things he did on active duty gave him a resume “leagues above” the other students in his class, and before entering the civilian workforce, he viewed his service as a SSAR swimmer as a unique advantage when showing potential employers his work ethic and dedication. When not on active support orders, reserve

swimmers come together quarterly to participate in a “SAR-a-Palooza,” affectionately named by Boatswain’s Mate Senior Chief Gregori Bianchini, the head of the program. During the week, RCS swimmers practice critical skills, maintain certifications, participate in group physical training, and bond as a unit. This event is intensive and cumulative. The beginning of the week starts in the pool, where the swimmers warm up with long-distance swims, buddy drags, and mask skills, then moves into advanced maneuvers like litter setup (a technique designed to keep the spine still during transport) and strop recovery (a horseshoe like floatation device). These skills, practiced in the pool are put to the test pier-side in the week’s final event.



Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea conduct a cumulative search and rescue event onboard USS Mustin (DDG 89) on Naval Base San Diego. Deploying from a Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) and the ship, Swimmers get hands-on training with the SAR litter, an advanced technique critical to patients who need to be kept still.



Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea, conduct a cumulative search and rescue event onboard USS Mustin (DDG 89), on Naval Base San Diego. Training in adverse conditions allows the swimmers to experience the rigors of rescues at sea with the safeguards of being pier-side.

On the event's penultimate day, swimmers get the chance to practice techniques they perfected throughout the week aboard an active surface vessel, this year, the USS Mustin (DDG 89). This real-life application of skills in an open water environment gives swimmers the confidence to execute real-time missions. Missions like Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Quinn Anderson went on, when underway with USS Cincinnati (LCS 20), for 3 months as part of RCS. This opportunity allowed Anderson to support the operational tasking of the Cincinnati and gave him the opportunity to train with the Chief Hospital Corpsman onboard for in-rate advancement and professional knowledge as a nursing student in his civilian life.





Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea, conduct a group physical training event on Naval Amphibious Base Coronado.) After a week of intensive training, this group run is designed to unite the team and celebrate the week's wins.



To meet the expanding demands of the Surface Fleet, the RCS program plays a pivotal role in meeting the increasing demand for SSAR swimmers as the Navy strives for 80% surge readiness. The program strengthens the fleet's operational capabilities by offering Navy Reserve Sailors like Case and Anderson the flexibility to balance civilian life and active-duty training. It enhances the professional development of those involved through rigorous training events like "SAR-a-Palooza" and real-

world applications aboard ships, these dedicated swimmers are equipped to save lives while furthering their careers. The RCS program exemplifies the Navy's commitment to maintaining readiness and providing Sailors with unique opportunities for growth, both in uniform and in their civilian endeavor. The mission of CNSP is to man, train, and equip the Surface Force to provide fleet commanders with credible naval power to control the sea and project power ashore. †



Gunnsmate First Class Matthew Tremblay, a Surface Search and Rescue Swimmer assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve Component to Sea, poses for a portrait at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado. To Tremblay, the Reserve to Sea Component to Sea program allows him to extend his service while allowing him to be flexible in his civilian life.