

Macomb Township native assists with rescues at sea

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Petty Officer 2nd Class Christopher Stefanides, a native of Macomb Township, joined the Navy to be challenged by doing something different, work with his hands and travel the world. Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Tim Miller

When Petty Officer 2nd Class Christopher Stefanides goes to work it's anyone's guess as to who he might be saving and where the rescue will be.

It could involve divers in the middle of the ocean separated from their boat or a sailor serving aboard an aircraft carrier off the coast of Thailand in need of medical attention.

It's all part of the job for the Dakota High School graduate.

Stefanides serves with Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 3, one of the United States Navy's most advanced helicopters at Naval Air Station North Island, San Diego.

"My favorite part about my rate is the ability to save someone else's life," said Stefanides in a news release. He joined the Navy to be challenged by doing something different, work with his hands and travel the world. "'So others may live' is the rescue swimmers motto, and that is what I live by."

It's also a family tradition.

"My dad served in the Army, two cousins are in the Navy and my grandfather also served," said Stefanides, who hails from Macomb Township. "To be able to continue the tradition of us being in the military is uplifting but also the pride that my parents and my family have for me makes it even better."

As a Naval aircrewman, Stefanides is responsible for search and rescue missions, logistics, operating the hoist and is a crew chief in the back of the aircraft.

The values required to succeed at what he does in the Navy, according to Stefanides, are similar to those found in his hometown.

"I apply the drive people had to push me to go past my limit to where I am now to push myself to be better," said Stefanides. "I am a rescue swimmer, but now I also try to do more."

With more than 90 percent of all trade traveling by sea, and 95 percent of the world's international phone and internet traffic carried through fiber optic cables lying on the ocean floor, Navy officials continue to emphasize that the prosperity and security of the U.S. is directly linked to a strong and ready Navy.

Pilots and aircrew are trained in the squadron to fly MH-60S "Seahawk" helicopters to ensure they are prepared for peacetime and warfighting missions.

Helicopters are equipped with the ability to conduct replenishments at sea, search and rescue missions and support other operations as needed.

Admiral Mike Gilday, chief of Naval Operations, said the focus of today's Navy is squarely on warfighting, warfighters and the capabilities needed for the Navy of the future.

"I am confident we will maximize the Navy we have today while delivering the Navy that our nation will rely upon tomorrow," said Gilday. "And we will do so with urgency. Our fleet will be a potent, formidable force that competes around the world every day, deterring those who would challenge us while reassuring our allies and partners."

There are many opportunities for sailors to earn recognition in their command, community and careers but Stefanides' most proud moment came while conducting a medical evacuation off USS Theodore Roosevelt, where the team ended up transporting a patient an hour flight from the carrier to Phuket, Thailand.

During that time I was breathing for the patient," said Stefanides. "We received an award as a crew from the Navy Helicopter Association. I was most proud of being able to do my job and transfer someone to higher care to save their life."

As a member of the U.S. Navy, Stefanides, as well as other sailors, know they are a part of a service tradition providing unforgettable experiences through leadership development, world affairs and humanitarian assistance. Their efforts will have a lasting effect around the globe and for generations of sailors who will follow.

"Serving in the Navy means dedication and pride to be able to do what I can for my country," said Stefanides. "This is what makes me the most proud and also what makes me want to become better not just for myself but for everyone around me."

-- Gina Joseph, *The Macomb Daily*