

# ALOHA & THERAPY

A full-page underwater photograph of a diver with a prosthetic arm. The diver is wearing a purple shirt, a red and white patterned life vest, and black fins. They are holding a black equipment case. Bubbles are rising from the diver's breathing apparatus. The background is a deep blue sea with a coral reef visible at the bottom.

UNDER THE DEEP BLUE SEA

Beneath the waves, they are nearly weightless, floating just inches away from back-flipping manta rays. They swim with dolphins and schools of neon tropical fish.

On land, they are warriors who have returned from tours in Iraq or Afghanistan with injuries ranging from severe burns or amputations to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury. They are male and female veterans with Soldiers Undertaking Disabled Scuba (SUDS), a nonprofit organization that uses scuba as a rehabilitative tool for service members who are ill, wounded or injured with a permanent disability. SUDS is about improving mobility and morale by training veterans in the challenging and rewarding world of scuba diving.

Established in 2007 and based at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., SUDS provides no-cost diving trips to these veterans at spots as close as North Carolina and as far away as Hawaii.

Recently, Auxiliary and Post 12122 members in Kailua Kona, Hawaii, hosted four veterans for a SUDS expedition. Funds in the amount of \$2,000 came from the Auxiliary's winning entry in Mauna Lani Bay Resort's Charity Christmas Tree contest. For \$1 per vote, guests picked which non-profit-designed tree they liked best, which in 2015, was the Auxiliary's SUDS tree. Auxiliary and Post members Barbara and Jack Cameron donated the use of their home in Kona Bay Estates for the visit.

"We shared with the community a very worthwhile nonprofit that we know helps our wounded and disabled veterans combat their PTSD and gives them a sense of painless peace of mind and pain-free bodies for a time," said Gaylene Hopson of Auxiliary 12122. "When you meet and talk to these men and women you get to hear their joy and enthusiasm of their experiences with their dives. Also they will tell you their stories, of their struggles

and triumphs. We have seen and experienced just how much the SUDS program does for our heroes."

Veterans who dive with SUDS have faced post-injury obstacles and enduring pain, but through SUDS, they also share in the camaraderie of being among fellow veterans who have had these similar experiences. And all veterans who dive with SUDS describe the experience as exceptional.

"It's been great fun to hang out with other veterans," said U.S. Army veteran Mark Roseberry. "I've been kind of disconnected since getting out and it's nice to be around other people who understand the same things that I've done and still deal with."

John Thompson, President of SUDS and U.S. Army National Guard veteran, said, "I often say I have the greatest job in the world and I truly believe that. Sometimes I feel that maybe I'm getting more out of this than the warrior. I feel truly blessed...it's just cool to bring (the veterans) together in a sport that they love and enjoy."

## SUDS IS A WAY TO SHOW SOME OF THE THINGS YOU STILL CAN DO.

Other veterans said SUDS has a transformative power.

"It's a sense of freedom – it's a whole other world beneath the ocean...Being in the water, being at depth, really helps alleviate some of the shoulder pain I have to contend with...After losing my leg in a parachuting accident, there are some things you can't do. I guess SUDS is a way to show some of the things you still can do."

"SUDS is an opportunity for me to reconnect with other injured veterans in an environment that's really therapeutic," said Ana Manciaz, who served in the U.S. Army and lost part of her leg. "The last time I came back from a SUDS trip, I signed up for a triathlon and it feels like coming to SUDS was the catalyst." ★ AC