USS Blue Ridge concludes patrol, Operation Tomodachi support

By MC3 Fidel C. Hart,
***USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs**

USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) Sailors and embarked 7th Fleet staff from Fleet Anti-terrorism Security Team Pacific (FASTPAC) returned to Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Japan, April 11, following a two-month patrol and support of Operation Tomodachi.

Blue Ridge aided the Navy Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HADR) efforts following the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan March 11. During its patrol, the ship visited Manila, Philippines; Hong Kong; Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Singapore.

"It was a challenging, yet rewarding underway period," said *Blue Ridge* Commanding Officer Capt. Rudy Lupton. "We were heartbroken by the devastation and loss of life caused by the earthquake and tsunami that struck Northeast Japan. But, [we were] honored to participate in Operation Tomodachi and provide assistance to the Japanese people."

The tragic events that occurred in Northeast Japan provided an opportunity to demonstrate the significant capability that flexible, rapidly deployable naval forces provide in this vital region. Lupton said he could not be more proud of how the crew adapted to changing events and how well they performed their jobs.

Blue Ridge was moored at Changi Naval Base in Singapore when the magnitude 9.0 earthquake occurred in Northeastern Japan. The earthquake was followed by a tsunami that washed over the coast. Within four hours of the earthquake all *Blue Ridge* and embarked 7th Fleet staff Sailors and civilians were accounted for and aboard ship.

During the evening of the natural disasters in Japan, *Blue Ridge* and 7th Fleet Sailors and Marines loaded pallets of HADR supplies onto the flight deck of the command ship. The 50-person working party, made larger by volunteers, loaded more than 90 pallets throughout the night. The supplies from Commander Logistics Group Western Pacific, included water, food, canteens and bedding.

(Right) AD2 Shizhen Huang, assigned to the Warlords of HSL 51, pulls a pallet of supplies to the flight deck of the U.S. 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) March 21. *Blue Ridge* transferred pallets of humanitarian assistance supplies to the Military Sealift Command fleet replenishment oiler *USNS Pecos* (T-AO 197) to support Operation Tomodachi relief efforts in Japan.

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Steven Khor

"I'm amazed at the things we've achieved in such a short time," said Master Chief Information Systems Technician Lonnie Gillilan. "We've all been pulling together, with no complaining. I'm very impressed."

Blue Ridge departed Changi Naval Base less than eight hours after loading the supplies, steaming toward Japan in support of the operation. The ship brought command-and-control to the operation, directed the mobilized force of ships, helicopters and ground forces while aiding the citizens of Japan.

The ship conducted several supply transfers by helicopter while at sea with *USNS Rappahannock* (T-AO 204) and *USNS Pecos* (T-AO 197), transferring HADR kits and supplies to the *USS Essex* (LHD 2) and *USS Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76).

"Our mission is to provide persistent command and control support to the Commander 7th Fleet as well as assist with developing and strengthening relationships with our partners in the region," said Lupton. "During the past two months, the crew excelled at accomplishing both missions."

Blue Ridge is the command ship for Commander U.S. 7th Fleet, and serves under Commander Expeditionary Strike Group 7/ Task Force 76, the Navy's only forward-deployed amphibious force. Task Force 76 is headquartered at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa, Japan with an operations detachment in Sasebo, Japan.

Online program helps 10,000 Sailors with college, career change

By Ed Barker, Naval Education and Training Command Public Affairs

The Navy's Online Academic Skills Course (OASC) logged its 10,000th Navy user April 12, less than one year since transitioning to a solely web-based program.

"Sailors looking at a change of rating should start with their command career counselor," said Master Chief Navy Career Counselor (SW/SCW/AW) Tod Shuls, Naval Education and Training Command force retention program manager. "The OASC is one of the tools that we can use to get Sailors where they need to be career-wise, and counselors review and track individual progress and verify completion of the program."

The OASC is a self-paced academic skills improvement program that evaluates an individual's reading level, vocabulary, and math ability. The program then designs customized individual lessons to increase proficiency in each of these academic areas.

Participants start by taking a pre-test to establish their areas that need improvement. After each module completion, a post-test is given to determine improvement. Participants can choose the length and depth of the courses based on needs and time available, including an abbreviated review with shortened lessons.

"The OASC helped me not only increase my ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) score by nearly 20 points, but also helped me prepare for college placement exams," said Ship's Serviceman 2nd Class (SW/AW) Ashlei Alexander, assistant to the career counselor at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola. "I'll be using the OASC again soon for a college math test I'm about to take."

The program gives Sailors 24-hour worldwide access to OASC from any computer with an internet connection. Each lesson is supported by interactive exercises such as drag-and-drop matching, and videogame-style, multiple choice or dynamic flash cards. Quizzes and practice problem sets help students gauge how well they are mastering the material.

"The OASC is accepted as one of the qualifiers that Sailors must have to retake the ASVAB," said Tom Smith, enlisted education coordinator for the Naval Education and Training Command (NETC). "One justification choice is showing that they have improved their educational and academic skills since their initial test, and the OASC online courses are accepted as demonstrating positive improvement in education. The test that current active-duty and reserve service members take to improve their ASVAB score is the AFCT (Armed Forces Classification Test)."

In addition to around-the-clock access from any Internet connection, the OASC is also available to Department of Defense family members and government civilians at no charge.

OASC is available at www.nko.navy.mil via the NKO Learning Tab and on the Navy College website under the academic skills link. Navigation to OASC is also available at: http://www.nelnetsolutions.com/dantes/.

For information on the Naval Education and Training Command visit the NETC website: https://www.netc.navy.mil.