Blanket of response from Sailors provides needed help to Japan

Story and photo by MC3 Adam K. Thomas, *USS George Washington* Public Affairs

Sailors aboard the aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) joined forces with members of the Free Masons of Japan to box up and ship out donated blankets to those in need May 10.

Sixteen pallets containing more than 1,500 blankets donated by *George Washington* Sailors, their families and various communities from across the United States were bound for Sendai, Japan to provide relief to victims of the 9.0 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami that struck the island nation March 11.

The delivery to Sendai was spearheaded by Phil Ambrose, Grand Secretary of the Free Masons of Japan.

"The damage to the Sendai area is much worse than people have seen on television; the area has been totally devastated by the tsunami," said Ambrose. "We're taking several truckloads of supplies and these blankets to try and help people recover from the devastation."

The *George Washington* crew, wanting to do whatever they could to help the people of Japan, initiated a blanked drive in the ship's hangar bay less than 48 hours after the earthquake and tsunami. The crew also reached out to their friends and family at home by posting a message on the ship's Facebook page asking them to donate.

"I think it's so important for human beings to help other human beings whenever there's a need," said Lt. Cmdr. Jose Pimentel, *George Washington* Catholic chaplain. "The earthquake happened so unexpectedly. Life was just going along and suddenly there was this tremendous tragedy, so we all feel the need to help. It's just human nature to want to help out and assist."

LS1 Joey Bean, a Sailor aboard the aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) (*GW*), moves boxes of donated blankets onto a flatbed truck outside of one of the *GW* warehouses May 10. The blankets, donated by *GW* Sailors and their families, were delivered to the areas of Japan hit hardest by the 9.0 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami that struck the island nation March 11.

As crates were quickly filling with blankets, *George Washington* and her crew were ordered to pull out to sea putting their efforts on hold. Two weeks into this unexpected deployment during a brief port visit to Sasebo, Japan, the ship received her first shipment of mail which included more than 1,000 blankets. One shipment alone, from the Lake Orion Police Department in Lake Orion, Mich., contained 425 blankets collected by school children from a nearby elementary school.

The response to the request for donations was so overwhelming that *George Washington* Sailors had a difficult time finding space to store all of the blankets while underway.

"This blanket drive started out as a really good idea that got a little complicated when the ship had to leave Japan for a then-undetermined period of time," said Pimentel. "It was fortunate that we were able to contact [Ambrose] and work with him from all ends. It's been a great effort from everybody involved, not just our Sailors and our families, but from people from two nations coming together to assist those devastated by this catastrophe, and it's a great thing that we were able to complete this project under the circumstances."

George Washington Sailors participate in physical fitness testing

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

USS George Washington (CVN 73) Sailors began running their spring physical fitness assessment (PFA) May 2. The testing period spans several weeks but most of the crew will complete the test within two weeks.

The PFA is conducted twice a year by U.S. Navy Sailors. The tests check to make sure that the Sailors are "fighting fit" and that they are physically capable of carrying out their missions. The PFA consists of a body composition analysis (BCA) where the Sailors are measured for their body fat percentage. The second part of the PFA is the physical readiness test (PRT) where Sailors must complete a required number of push-ups, sit-ups and a 1.5 mile run within a set time limit.

Assistant Command Fitness Leader (ACFL) Lt. Kevin Wilson, was in charge of the test May 4. ACFL are crew members that work for the command fitness leader and help administer the test. "I like leading them through the exercise, getting them motivated," said Wilson. "Getting [the Sailors] through the standardized warm-ups and ready to do their best, that's my favorite part."

Sailors from command religious ministries, safety and other departments were also testing. The group covered most of a soccer field and running track behind the Purdy Fitness Center. "The main department going today is the air department which has roughly 630 people. So, all of air department will be out here today to get the PRT part of their PFA done," Wilson said. "Tomorrow will be another department with another large group to get through this process."

***USS George Washington* (CVN 73) Sailors start the 1.5 mile run as part of their spring PFA on the running track behind Purdy Fitness Center May 4. Most of the ship's crew will complete the test within two weeks.**

The group was large enough that it had to be separated into sections. While some Sailors were checking in, others were stretching, warming up and testing. Electronics Technician 1st Class Mark Bain was an ACFL working with Wilson to make sure everyone was safe and working their way through the PRT. "I like doing this, running a group this big and keeping them motivated, it can be a challenge," Bain said. "I'm confident we can get it done and that our [Sailors] are going to get some good scores."

George Washington Sailors are only in port Yokosuka for less than half of each year. So, they must maintain their fitness when at sea using the onboard gyms and equipment. "Because we have such a short time in port, it means that our work hours can be more strenuous than other carriers," said Wilson. "So, having our guys in good shape not only helps them stay focused when at work but it helps them be more productive in this unique environment."

Wilson emphasized that the Sailor's fitness is always important, not just for passing the PFA but to always be ready if the Navy orders them to support individual augmentee missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The editor asks:

Did you know, service members are required to report any changes in dependent status to their local Personnel Support Detachment?

Recently, a 1st class petty officer racked up more than $17,000 in debt because he got married.

As a single Sailor living on a ship, he requested to move off base and received Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA) and full Cost of Living Allowance (COLA). Later, the Sailor got married in the Philippines with out following specific instructions, returned to Japan but did not update his Page 2.

The overpayment was discovered when he submitted paperwork requesting Family Separation Allowance (FSA) due to the Voluntary Military Assisted Departure (VMAD) of his unreported spouse.

Anytime their is a change not only in dependent status, but any change that affects pay and entitlements, such as Permanent Change of Station (PCS) transfers, service members are required to check out or in to their local PSD. Failure to do so can affect payment of OHA, COLA, Career Sea Pay, leave and et cetera.

Contact PSD Yokosuka or your Command Pay/Personnel Support System (PASS) coordinator for more information.