Blue Ridge Sailors fitted for CBR equipment

Story by MC3 Mel Orr, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

Sailors aboard U.S. 7th Fleet command flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) were fit-tested with chemical, biological, and radiological (CBR) equipment Oct. 17.

During the test-fit Sailors were fitted the advanced chemical protective garment (ACPG) and accompanying rubber gloves and boots to ensure proper and safe function of the CBR ensemble.

The ACPG consists of a jacket, trousers, chemical protective over-boots, chemical protective gloves, a canteen, web-belt, and MCU-2P protective mask, more commonly referred to as a gas mask.

The ACPG and MCU-2P help prevent Sailors from contracting chemical, biological and radiological contaminants, which enemy combatants could use against the ship's crew. Certain agents have far-reaching and damaging effects on the human body, and are so horrifying that their use has been banned by international law.

In addition to the ACPG, personnel were fitted with the MCU-2P gas mask and tested to ensure the mask remains secure in case of a CBR attack.

Each Sailor performed a series of exercises to test the seal of the mask; moving their head side to side, breathing through the nose, up and down head movements, and rotating the jaw to simulate talking while wearing the mask.

"The purpose of this process is to fit everyone with the proper CBR equipment," said Lt. Jerry Belmonte, *Blue Ridge* damage control assistant.

Belomonte said the goal is to make sure everyone has their own CBR bag with all of the equipment next year.

The only exception will be the injectors, which will stay with medical.

Personnel aboard ships are typically tested for CBR equipment several months prior to going on patrol.

In addition to fit testing the protective gear, Sailors undergo drills during which they are required to practice donning their protective equipment with the shortest amount of time possible.

During some drills, Sailors are required to preform in damage control scenarios while wearing the ACPG and MCU-2P, as well.

CBR Technician Jose Perez instructs EMFN Sydney Blom how to properly don an advanced chemical protective garment (ACPG) on the mess decks aboard U.S. 7th Fleet command flagship USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) Oct. 17.
U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Timmy Wakefield

USS Denver welcomes new commanding officer during ceremony

Story and photo by MC2 Bryan Blair, USS Denver Public Affairs

SOUTH CHINA SEA – *USS Denver* (LPD 9) held a change of command ceremony aboard the ship on Oct. 18 while steaming in the South China Sea.

Capt. Michael Wettlaufer relieved Capt. Mario Mifsud as commanding officer, becoming the 29th commanding officer of *Denver* since the ship was commissioned at Lockheed Shipbuilding and Construction Company, in Seattle, July 7, 1968.

"I am very fortunate and humbled to have the opportunity to work with this fine crew, mess and wardroom as we tackle future challenges," said Wettlaufer. "I am honored to be aboard and serve with each of you."

Wettlaufer, who is a native of Denver, earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology from Colorado State University.

He also earned a Master of Science degree in Aviation Systems from the University of Tennessee and a Master of Arts degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College.

In 1988, Wettlaufer received designation as a Naval Aviator.

He has since served as a test pilot and landing signal officer with Strike Aircraft Test Squadron, a department head to the "Dambusters" of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 195, fixed wing tutor and test pilot at the Empire Test Pilots' School in the United Kingdom, an associate fellow in the Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Group, as the executive officer and commanding officer of VFA-195, and as the executive officer aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Stennis (CVN 74).

The ceremony brought to a close a successful 16-month command tour for Mifsud.

During that time *Denver* Sailors chose to stay in the Navy at a high rate, earning the ship the Golden Anchor Award for retention excellence.

During the ceremony, Mifsud recognized them for their hard work and dedication.

"While our Navy has set out to achieve greater diversity in our force, we have known for a very long time that the strength of America and its Navy is its people," said Mifsud. "I would submit there are no greater Americans than those of you who stand before me today."

Mifsud's next assignment will be as commanding officer of the Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps at Georgia Tech University in Atlanta.

The Austin-class amphibious transport dock *USS Denver,* which is currently underway in the Western Pacific participating in support of Amphibious Landing Exercise 2012, is forward-deployed to Sasebo, Japan and part of the Essex Amphibious Ready Group.

Capt. Michael Wettlaufer addresses the crew for the first time as commanding officer during a change of command ceremony aboard the amphibious transport dock *USS Denver* (LPD 9) Oct. 18. Wettlaufer is *Denver*'s 29th commanding officer since the ship's commissioning in 1968.