George Washington Sailors present Christmas tree to *JDS Hyuga*

Story and photos by MC3 Jacob D. Moore, *USS George Washington* Public Affairs

A group of USS *George Washington* (CVN 73) Sailors began what could likely become a holiday tradition by presenting the GW's sister ship, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) helicopter destroyer *JDS Hyuga* (DDH 181), with a Christmas tree as a gesture of goodwill between the two nations and the two navies.

The tree was purchased at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka's Navy Exchange and presented to the *Hyuga*, which is home-ported at JMSDF Fleet Headquarters in Yokosuka, Japan.

With this being the first time for an event of this magnitude, *George Washington* sailors were very careful in their tree selection.

"Our idea, having never bought a tree for another ship before, was to get the biggest, most beautiful tree that we possibly could," said Logistics Specialist 1st Class Dametries Holmes. "We decided on a 7-foot Noble Fir, brought it back to the *George Washington*, nurtured it a little bit and presented it to the crew of the *Hyuga*."

Upon delivering the tree, the *George Washington* Sailors decorated it with ornaments, lights and garland on the *Hyuga*'s quarterdeck.

"The Christmas season is all about giving," said Holmes. "And having the opportunity to share a holiday in a different country is really awesome."

This gave GW Sailors the opportunity not only to visit a Japanese ship, but also experience a piece of Japanese culture.

Sailors from the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73) and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force helicopter destroyer JDS Hyuga (DDH 181) stand in front of a Christmas tree that was given as a gift from the crew of the George Washington to the crew of the Hyuga Dec. 15.

After the tree was set up and decorated, the *GW* Sailors were welcomed into the *Hyuga*'s hanger bay to participate in a Japanese *mochi*-pounding ceremony or "*Mochitsuki*," which is a Japanese New Year tradition in which cooked rice is pounded with wooden mallets into a sticky paste and then served with a sweet topping or filling.

The Sailors were glad to participate, and their Japanese counterparts were happy to share their tradition.

"I've never even seen this food before, but it's delicious to eat," said Ensign Kyle Ellis, from *George Washington*'s Supply Department. "Some hard work is put into making it, but it's worth it in the end. It was delicious."

This holiday exchange was just another example of how the United States and Japanese Navies continue to strengthen the friendship between two long-standing allies.

"I think everyone had fun with the pounding of the *mochi*," said JDS Hyuga Command Master Chief Motonari Suzuki. "It was a very good event for connecting the U.S. and Japanese navies."

Naval Safety Center afloat directorate head: *USS Blue Ridge* 'best ship out of 134'

Story and photo by MC2 Timmy Wakefield, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

Naval Safety Center (NSC) inspectors completed *USS Blue Ridge*'s (LCC 19) safety survey Wednesday, designating *Blue Ridge* as 'best ship out of 134 in safety standards.

The survey provides assistance and advice to the chief of naval operations, master chief petty officer of the navy and the deputy assistant secretary of the navy for safety, in order to enhance the warfighting capabilities of the Navy and Marine Corps, preserve resources and improve combat readiness by preventing mishaps and saving lives.

Department heads designate chief petty officers and above to represent components of safety as safety survey coordinators. The components include main propulsion, damage control, auxiliary, hazardous materials and weapons. All of the components were thoroughly inspected for safety issues.

Blue Ridge Commanding Officer Capt. Daniel Grieco, said the ship sets the standards for the fleet.

"*Blue Ridge*'s reputation as the Navy's finest command ship is only possible with, among several other items, the constant pursuit of high safety standards," Grieco said. "The entire command understands the fact that safety saves lives, time and money."

The NSC is led by NSC Afloat Directorate Head Capt. Douglas J. Holderman, who led the safety survey. Holderman held a meeting with *Blue Ridge*'s officers and chief petty officers, outlining how high standards of safety improve combat readiness.

Safety Officer Lt. Cmdr. Thomas Ehring and Assistant Safety Officer Lt. j.g. Rachel Gladstone, were the leading personnel for getting the ship ready for the inspection.

"I learned a lot about the processes for getting the ship ready for the inspection," Gladstone said.

"*Blue Ridge* has high safety standards, which are adhered to because the ship's crew makes sure the proper training and procedures are being done correctly," Gladstone said.

"*Blue Ridge* will continue to maintain its high safety standards and be an example to the fleet," Grieco said. "Our Sailors will always be mission ready and always return home safely."

Naval Safety Center Afloat Director Head Capt. Douglas J. Holderman explains to officers and chief petty officers aboard *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) about the importance of maintaining high standards of safety. *Blue Ridge* was ranked best ship out of 134 for reducing total number of discrepancies by more than half.