Red Cross volunteers visit *USS George Washington*

By MC3 Kaitlyn R. Breitkreutz, *USS George Washington* Public Affairs

Volunteers from the American and Japanese Red Cross associations handed out holiday greetings cards to Sailors aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* Dec. 17.

The cards were written by Americans for distribution to U.S. service men and women overseas.

The 20 volunteers handed the cards to every Sailor they met during their visit to the ship. The volunteers were high school students from the city of Yokosuka, Japan and Nile C. Kinnick High School on Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY).

"We get so many cards every year from people in the states and those that admire you guys and what you do," said Canneah Thigpen, chairmen of volunteers for the American Red Cross at CFAY. "We're happy to do it and happy to be here."

The Sailors accepting the cards could be seen with smiles on their faces as they walked away.

Volunteers with the American Red Cross and Japanese Red Cross organizations hand out Christmas cards on the mess decks of the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) Dec. 17. Most of the volunteers were Japanese high school students from Yokosuka city and Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka's Nile C. Kinnick High School.

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Alexander W. Cabrall

"They're creative and it's nice to be shown that people care," said Aviation Ordnanceman Airmen Tremayne Robinson from Chicago, Ill. "It means a lot to get a card – especially at this time of the year."

Sailors aboard the *USS George Washington* weren't the only ones excited by the visit.

The volunteers were happy to be able to come aboard the ship and see what it was like.

"I've never been on a ship before. The ship is very large. It is so cool!" said Hiroe Suzuki, a Japanese Red Cross volunteer.

The Red Cross of Yokosuka has also shown support for other events on base and for military members in the area by volunteering at the Navy College, The Yokosuka base library, local schools and sponsoring festivals and fundraising events.

The volunteers were part of a group of 40 volunteers from both the American and Japanese Red Cross associations who visited the U.S. 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) and Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer *USS Stethem* (DDG 63).

The *George Washington* returned to her forward-operating port of CFAY, Nov. 22 after a nine-week patrol. *George Washington* is the Navy's only full-time forward-deployed aircraft carrier ensuring security and stability in the western Pacific Ocean.

'Winter Wonderland' brings *Blue Ridge*, students together

Story and photo by MC3 Brian A. Stone, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

Sailors from the U.S. 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) supported the sixth-grade class at Yokosuka Middle School (YMS) during a "Winter Wonderland" event in the school's gym Dec. 13.

The Winter Wonderland event was a potluck, talent show and educational event organized by parents and teachers to raise money for the school.

A portion of the sixth-grade class, referred to as "*Blue Ridge* Team," invited *Blue Ridge* Sailors to play games and interact with students as part of Winter Wonderland.

"It's a really good connection we have," said Janice Haines, a Yokosuka Middle School reading teacher and member of the YMS *Blue Ridge* team. "It helps us and the students see the connection between the base and themselves. It also provides good role models, because in all reality, these students don't have long before they're looking for a job themselves."

Lt. Donald Baker, *Blue Ridge* command chaplain, helped coordinate the community service event with the school. Baker said he was happy to see the children's delight while interacting with Sailors.

"We really played a big part in making this interaction something the children enjoyed," said Baker. "It's so important for them to know we care."

Social studies teacher Joy Bork spoke passionately with several Sailors about *Blue Ridge*'s involvement with the students. Bork said that every time the school has asked *Blue Ridge* for support, the command went above and beyond to interact with the children.

"*Blue Ridge*'s involvement means so much to us," said Bork. "At the beginning of the school year, we asked a few Sailors to come and 18 Sailors came to teach the students about what they do. We love having *Blue Ridge* Sailors come over because they are such positive role models."

One of the *Blue Ridge* Sailors attending the event, Machinist's Mate Fireman Ashley Smith, said she loved interacting with the children.

***USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) Sailors pose with Yokosuka Middle School (YMS) sixth-grade students and teachers after a "Winter Wonderland" raffle and potluck community service event held in the YMS gymnasium Dec. 13. (Back row from left) Pictured are MMFN Ashley Smith, MM3 Tyrone Bailey, Lt. Donald Baker, YN3 Randy Sarran, Janice Haines, ET2 Daryl Middleton, Lisa Vitrella, Tonya Tehranie, Jasmine Bennett, Raymond Doerr, Jaremiah Carino, Joy Bork and Zion Bailey.**

U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Brian A. Stone

"The children were so interested in our ship," said Smith. "They love our ship. They were shouting '*Blue Ridge, Blue Ridge*!' near the end. I had so much fun playing with the children. I would love to come again."

The event reflected a continued partnership between *Blue Ridge* and YMS, a Department of Defense Dependent School.