George Washington hosts Spring Festival Open House

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

The crew of the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) welcomed aboard more than 11,000 guests during Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka's annual Spring Festival March 25.

"This is a great opportunity for us to thank the Japanese for their kindness and friendship while *George Washington* is forward deployed in the western Pacific," said Capt. David A. Lausman, commanding officer of *George Washington*.

Guests were able to tour the ship's hanger bay and participate in interactive displays coordinated by *George Washington*'s Security, Weapons, Media, Medical, Operations, Engineering and Air departments. Many tried on equipment, witnessed a mock surgery, manned a 50-caliber machine gun, had their photo taken with a Sailor and rode an aircraft elevator to and from the flight deck.

"The reaction to the displays has been very positive," said Aviation Ordnanceman 1st Class Marlon Bell, who is from East St. Louis, Ill. "They're very appreciative."

"When I first set up we had people coming up right away and it was all smiles. It's a lot of work to put these displays together, but it's worth it when we get those smiles," said Bell.

One of the largest crowds formed in front of the Security department exhibit where guests could dress in tactical gear while others had the opportunity to swing a practice baton at a patrolman wearing the "Red Man" protective gear.

"I've had people of all ages coming up," said Airman Eric McFarland from Houston. "The Japanese people are very polite. They didn't want to hurt him, but once they realized how safe we are in our gear, they had a lot of fun."

On the flight deck, visitors saw where *George Washington* launches and recovers more than 100 aircraft daily while underway, but just getting to and from the flight deck proved to be an exciting opportunity as cheers could be heard across the base with each elevator run.

"Our Sailors go up and down on the aircraft elevators all the time, but seeing this through the eyes of our guests really reminds us how exciting a job aboard an aircraft carrier can be," said Lausman.

On the pier, dozens of volunteers from the *George Washington* Chief Mess, First Class Petty Officers Association, Coalition of Sailors Against Destructive Decisions Chapter and Family Readiness Group sold ship merchandise, hamburgers, hot dogs and drinks, raising thousands of dollars that benefits the crew's Morale, Welfare and Recreation fund.

HN Amber Brace from Fort Worth, Texas, gives a tooth brushing demonstration to a Japanese local aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) during Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka's Spring Festival March 25. moer than 40,000 people toured *George Washington* during Spring Festival, an annual event that lets the local Japanese community see up close and personal how the U.S. Navy operates.
U.S. Navy photo by MCSA Brian H. Abel

George Washington returned to her forward-operating port of Yokosuka, Japan November 22 after navigating more than 50,000 nautical miles across the Western Pacific during her summer and fall patrols. While underway, the crew operated with more than a dozen different nations helping to ensure security and stability across the region.

USS Blue Ridge arrives in Manila for port visit

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

MANILA, Republic of the Philippines – The 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) arrived in Manila, Republic of the Philippines March 23 for a port visit.

Blue Ridge and embarked 7th Fleet staff Sailors and Marines will strengthen ties between the two countries through community service events, combined military training and cultural exchanges during the port visit.

QM2 Louis Gonzales assigned to U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) observes Sailors manning the rails while pulling into Manila, Republic of the Philippines for a port visit March 23. While in port, *Blue Ridge* and embarked 7th Fleet staff Sailors and Marines will strengthen ties between the two countries through community service event's, combined military training and cultural exchanges.
U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Alexandra Arroyo

With more than 100 Sailors and Marines on the ship with Filipino backgrounds, many members of the crew will use the port visit to see their families. It's an exciting time for these crew members, some of whom have not been to their homeland since childhood. For one crew member, a special ceremony awaits her third visit to Manila while on the *Blue Ridge*.

"My fiance and I are having a commitment ceremony," said Machinist's Mate Fireman Joangela Tanilon. "Ericka and I have invited more than 50 family members and friends to witness our ceremony at a church in Quezon City. I'm ecstatic and have been keeping myself busy on the ship so the days go by fast."

According to Tanilon, aside from seeing her fiance and family, she is excited to show her shipmates the sights and tastes of Manila that she loves.

"I love Filipino street food, especially fish balls, balut, and dried mango with shrimp sauce. The ambiance of Manila and how happy people look makes me smile. Manila is a romantic city, everywhere you go you will see people holding hands."

Sailors who do not have family in the area, have a multitude of options to choose from while in port. The ship's morale, welfare and recreation committee sold tours throughout the week that many crew members signed up for. There are also scheduled basketball games and soccer matches between crew members and their Filipino counterparts.

U.S. 7th Fleet Sailors and Marines have a long and close history with the people of the Philippines. Two decades after the closing of Subic Bay Naval Base and more than 65 years after the end of World War II, U.S. service men and women continue to strengthen bonds through community service projects, building friendships on liberty, and sharing their unique cultures.

Since 1947, the United States and the Republic of the Philippines have had a mutual agreement allowing the United States to recruit Philippine citizens for voluntary enlistment into the United States Armed Forces. Until it closed in 1992, the majority of the recruitment of Filipinos in the U.S. Navy was done at Subic Bay. Lt. Jerry Belmonte, *Blue Ridge*'s damage control assistant, was one of the last Sailors to come from the Subic Bay recruiting center.

"The process I went through to enlist in the Navy, it was tough," Belmonte said. "They would choose among 200 people in one day. We'd be lined up at the main gate next to the recruiting station and from there, we'd begin by taking tests, going through background checks, having our English comprehension graded and then validating our tests. By the time the process was completed, out of 200 people, I was one of only four left."

Belmonte said the day he stood in the recruiting line at Subic Bay was the hardest part of his Navy career. Despite having to spend his first two and a half years in the Navy as an undesignated deck seaman, Belmonte prepared himself to take full advantage of the opportunities a military career would provide him. Within 11 years of standing in the recruiting line, Belmonte was commissioned a Naval officer.

"You grow up with a certain mindset when you are born and raised in a Third World country," Belmonte said. "You work hard to make it and there are not a lot of opportunities available. The U.S. Navy gave a lot of Filipinos like myself an opportunity to have a lot of career options. For myself, enlisting in the Navy was a life saver, a real life saving event."