USS Blue Ridge Sailors tour *HMAS Ballarat*

Story and photo by MC3 James Norman, USS Blue Ridge Public Affairs

SOUTH CHINA SEA – Eleven Sailors assigned to U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) toured the Australian Anzac-class Frigate *HMAS Ballarat* (FFH-155) May 9.

Blue Ridge Sailors spent time aboard *Ballarat* learning the differences and similarities of our navies and ships.

They were shown damage control bases, the machinery control room, cafe, quarterdeck, recreational areas and administration offices.

"Showing American Sailors around the ship was a fantastic and rewarding experience because it's important we maintain a trusting relationship," said Australian Marine Technician Leading Seaman Brad Salter. "I think the highlight of the tour was being able to sit down in the cafe [galley] so our Sailors could interact with *Blue Ridge* Sailors. It was interesting to see how our two navies are similar, yet very unique."

Marine Technician Leading Seaman Brad Salter discusses the differences and similarities of U.S. and Australian navies during a tour of the Royal Australian Navy frigate *HMAS Ballarat* (FF 155) with Sailors assigned to U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) May 8. *Blue Ridge* conducted an exchange exercise between ships to demonstrate commitment to regional partnerships and fostering relations.

"I enjoyed the chance to see a foreign naval vessel, especially in a fashion at sea where we were brought here on a rigid hull inflatable boat, and left on a helicopter," said Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Tasha Martinez. "It was amazing to see how the *Ballarat* worked as a diesel vessel compared to our steam ship where everything is operated by valves."

Blue Ridge and *Ballarat* participated in a passing exercise (PASSEX). The SH-60 Foxtrot Sea Hawk Helicopter, assigned to Warlords Light Helo Antisubmarine Squadron 51 (HSL 51) embarked aboard *Blue Ridge*, conducted vertical replenishments (VERTREPs) with the *Ballarat*, which involved practicing loading and unloading pallets from ship-to-ship.

"HSL 51 pilots had the chance to conduct VERTREPs with an air crew other than our own," said Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Meyers, HSL 51 Air Boss. "The Australian navy uses different terminology and gestures we're not normally accustomed to and that prepares us for possible future joint task force operations. As allies to the Australian navy, the purpose of the VERTREPs were to help train the helicopter pilots and air detachment crew to work together."

Blue Ridge Sailors returned to *Blue Ridge* via helicopter.

"Working with the Australian navy was a joy and many people don't get this kind of opportunity to board a foreign naval vessel at sea," said Lt. j.g. John Money, *Blue Ridge* navigator. "It was wonderful to see how the Australian navy conducted their everyday navy life, compared to how an American Sailor would. This was a great chance I was afforded and I won't forget it."

USS George Washington kicks off sea trials

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

USS GEORGE WASHINGTON, AT SEA – *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) departed Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan, May 12 to conduct sea trials in preparation for the ship's next patrol.

George Washington sailed from its Truman Bay pier into open waters to begin a certification process that will ensure the ship, its equipment and crew are ready for extended periods at sea.

"We're ready to execute sea trials," said Capt. David A. Lausman, *George Washington*'s commanding officer. "This is an all hands evolution and we have the most professional Sailors who thrive on 'by the book with the book open' operations. They will execute the mission meticulously."

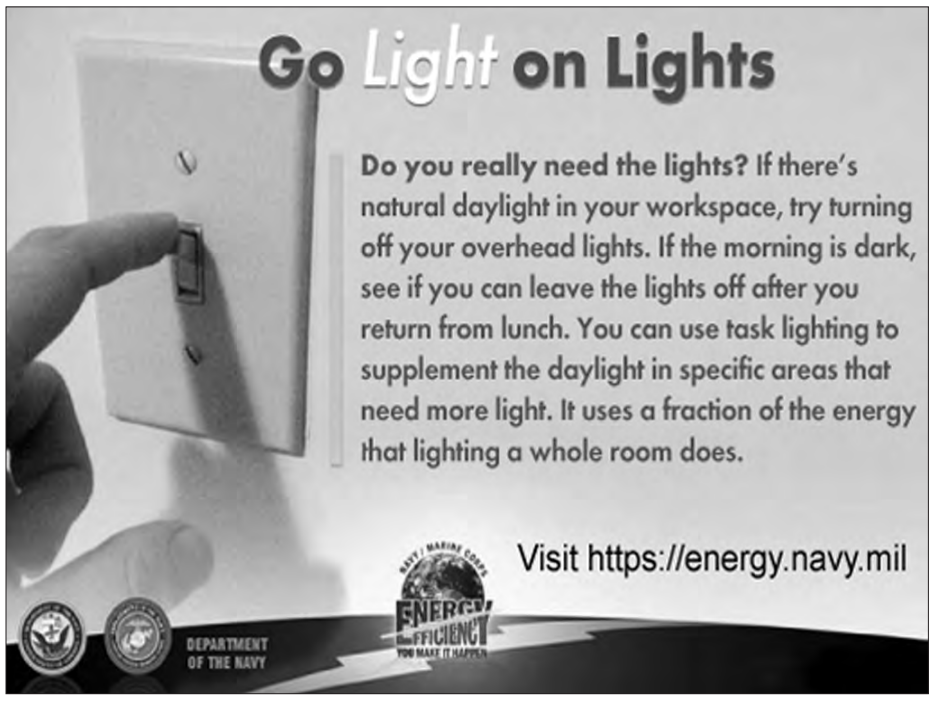
After working alongside craftsmen from the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Ship Repair Facility Yokosuka to complete routine maintenance to the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, Sailors will now put the ship through a series of tests before going underway.

"This is an exciting day," said Cmdr. Wes McCall, *George Washington*'s navigator. "It's been six months since we were last underway so it's great to be heading back out where we belong."

Before leaving port, crew members participated in two simulated days at sea to begin the testing period and to get in the right mind set for the anticipated patrol. In 2011, *George Washington* safely navigated 55,000 nautical miles across the western Pacific.

Sea trials will test every system, every procedure and every piece of equipment. Tests will include opening and closing hangar bay doors, raising and lowering aircraft elevators, testing internal and external communication systems, as well completing each department's unique check-off list to ensure mission readiness.

Sailors aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) practice firefighting techniques during a general quarters drill. George Washington is pier side in Yokosuka, Japan and making preparations to return to sea.

U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Kaitlyn R. Breitkreutz

"This is an important time for us," said Chief Warrant Officer Chris Sullivan. "It's our time to prepare and make sure all our equipment is 100 percent ready to support the ship's mission."