USS Blue Ridge crew concludes Thailand port visit

Story and photo by MC2 Melvin Orr, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

LAEM CHAEBANG, Thailand - Sailors from U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), embarked 7th Fleet staff, and Marines from the Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team Pacific departed from Laem Chaebang, Thailand May 30, after a five-day port visit.

The port visit presented an opportunity for the Sailors and Marines to serve as goodwill ambassadors from the U.S., promote peace and stability in the Southeast Asia region, to demonstrate commitment to regional partnerships, and foster growing relationships.

The religious program aboard *Blue Ridge*, led by *Blue Ridge* Navy chaplain Lt. Donald Baker, arranged community service (COMSERVs) events for Sailors to participate each day during the port visit.

SHSN Krista Stelzner, assigned to U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), takes a photo with a Thai girl during a community service event at The Child Development and Protection Center in Huay Yai May 26.

"Our visits to these different sites were of the utmost importance in the grand scheme of things," said Baker. "Probably not much strategic importance or national defense importance, but being able to bring light in some really dark situations from a humanity perspective."

More than 60 Sailors visited Pattaya Children's Home, Child Development and Protection Center, Camillian Civilian Social Center, and Royal Thai Marine Corps Nursery Center as part of a COMSERV where they landscaped, played with children and interacted with local community members.

"Honestly, the experience was life changing," said Ship's Serviceman 3rd Class Krista Stelzner who participated in all four COMSERVs in Thailand. "Going on those COMSERVs made me understand loving people. Every children's home we visited, the kids ran up to us and hugged us without even knowing who we were. All they wanted was love."

Another event involving *Blue Ridge* Sailors, gave several culinary specialists the opportunity to demonstrate their skill sets, have fun with rival Thai chefs, and reach out to a larger Thai audience through Thailand's Iron Chef television show that was filmed in front of a live audience in Bangkok.

"Iron Chef gives them the chance to go outside the box, show the talent they've learned from [Navy] schools and training and put their own personal touch on it," said *Blue Ridge* "Chow Boss" Chief Warrant Officer Brian Ware. "I think it's a great event, great morale booster, and something they'll never forget in their career."

Culinary Specialist 1st Class Frank Medina led a three-man team with Culinary Specialists 2nd Class Nelson Malaxi and Manuelito Belocura, who earned their spots on the team during a ship-wide competition while *Blue Ridge* was underway.

"I was humbled to take part in the show," said Medina. "I wanted to take this opportunity to learn from a master chef but I brought my best level of competition with my team members."

The United States has a longstanding relationship with Thailand going back to the early 19th century. In 1933, the two countries signed Treaty of Amity and Commerce, making Thailand (then called Siam) the first Southeast Asian nation to make a formal diplomatic agreement with the United States.

George Washington welcomes NROTC midshipmen

By MC3 Jacob I. Allison, *USS George Washington* Public Affairs

PHILIPPINE SEA (June 1, 2012) – Midshipmen from 12 Naval Reserve Officer Training Corp (NROTC) units throughout the U.S. arrived today aboard *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) as part of the summer cruise program.

Midshipmen participate in these annual summer training cruises to enhance their professional development.

"The assignment of these midshipmen to operational fleet units provides them with valuable motivational and instructional experiences not attainable in their normal classroom environment," said Lt. Cmdr. Patrick Callan, *George Washington*'s training officer.

Each midshipman will be assigned an officer or enlisted mentor, called a running mate, and will spend time in at least two departments during their three-week cruise.

The purpose of embarking first class midshipman in fleet units is to provide functional training in the duties and responsibilities of afloat junior officers.

"We're out here to experience the operational Navy," said Midshipman 1st Class Joseph Morris from Idaho State University. "I'm looking forward to the opportunity to observe and participate in the day-to-day operation of my running mate's division."

For most midshipmen second class, this summer cruise will be their first exposure to the operational Navy. They are embarked in fleet units to experience life aboard a Navy ship.

"Midshipmen second class will be assigned to duties normally assigned to second and third-class petty officers," said Callan. "This is so that they may gain an appreciation of the tasks and responsibilities typical of that position as well as the relationship between the division officer, the work center supervisor, and division personnel.

The midshipmen will observe or participate in shipboard evolutions, to include General Quarters drills, Captain's Mast, Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boat operations, replenishment-at-sea evolutions, weapons familiarization and qualification, and bridge watches.

(Left) MA1 Andrew Williams from Peoria, Ill., observes Midshipman 3rd Class Maria May from Chester, Va., as she fires a 9mm pistol during a live-fire exercise held aboard the U.S. Navy's forward deployed aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) June 2. Twelve midshipmen are temporarily embarked aboard *George Washington* for specialized training to complete their Navy Reserve Officer Training Corp (NROTC) education.

U.S. Navy photo by MC3 William Pittman

"Our objectives are to further the professional development of midshipmen and introduce them to operations of the Navy," said Callan. "We hope to instill a sense of pride and identification with the Navy, and to pique their interest in the operations of the fleet."