Blue Ridge hosts special holiday dinner for Sailors, families

Story and photo by MC1 Josh Huebner, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) and embarked 7th Fleet staff Sailors were welcomed aboard to share the holiday with shipmates and family during a special Christmas dinner in the crew's galley Dec. 25 while inport Yokosuka, Japan.

While most Sailors enjoyed a day off or leave for Christmas, a portion of the ship's crew stayed aboard to maintain the flagship's mission readiness.

For 15 of those Sailors, the mission was to prepare a Christmas dinner for their shipmates standing duty and those who couldn't make it home.

"We started preparing and cooking at 7 a.m.," said Culinary Specialist 1st Class Corey Montgomery, wardroom supervisor. "A lot of the people coming to the dinner are here on duty so we're trying to make their Christmas a little better by giving them a great meal, to make them feel at home."

In the crew's galley, Culinary Specialist 1st Class Mario Urbina, the watch captain, kept his team motivated while helping them prepare the spread.

"Everyone really puts in the extra effort during special meals like this. I've been in the Navy nine years, and I've worked on Christmas six times, so I know how much a good meal can mean to someone when they're working the holidays," said Urbina.

Christmas lights and decorations lit up the mess decks as Sailors brought family members aboard to share the meal and holiday spirit.

Yeoman 3rd Class Donta Freeman, an administrative assistant, brought his friend Hospitalman Apprentice Sara Clark, who is stationed at U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka, aboard to join him for dinner.

"It's really cool they did this for us. It's nice being able to share Christmas with friends and have a big dinner," said Freeman.

The chefs cooked a spread that included turkey, glazed ham, carved roast rib-eye, shrimp and pies.

CSSN Michael Angelo Leobo eats Christmas dinner with his friend, ITSA Amy Jones, in the crew's galley aboard *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) Dec. 25. *Blue Ridge* and embarked U.S. 7th Fleet staff Sailors and family members enjoyed Christmas dinner aboard the flagship.

"This is something we're proud to do, it's standard," said Chief Culinary Specialist Egbert San Pedro, "It's the traditional family dinner and the Sailors really like having a special meal while they're serving on Christmas."

LDO, CWO communities under review

By Commander Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs

In an effort to ensure the right specialists are in the right place, the Bureau of Naval Personnel (BUPERS) announced Dec. 29 that it has been conducting a review of its technical leadership since August 2010 and will brief Navy leadership in late February 2011.

The Navy's limited duty officer (LDO) and chief warrant officer (CWO) communities are being evaluated so that the right technical specialists are doing technical leadership jobs, said Capt. John Jones, LDO/CWO community manager at BUPERS.

"We want to make sure that we have the right balance within our pay-grade structure to allow the opportunity for upward mobility without bottlenecks or even a lack of opportunity at a particular pay grade," said Jones. "Correcting our structure will ensure better opportunities for advancement, manage expectations and improve opportunity for many designators – particularly CWOs."

The chief of naval personnel ordered the review of both LDO and CWO designators and billets.

"The assumption is that all of the billets reviewed are valid work, so what we have done is identify very small designators where the work is done by both LDOs and CWOs," said Jones. "Billets that look like division officer work were transferred from LDO to CWO. Billets that had significant senior positions were transferred from CWO to LDO."

Additionally, Jones explained that current senior LDOs and CWOs in positions that may transfer will be continued on active duty.

"This 'aging of the workforce' will ensure the Navy gets the technical experts it needs in the future," said Jones.

LDOs and CWOs are technical leaders who are selected from the enlisted ranks based on merit, technical knowledge and sound leadership. LDOs are selected from E-6 to E-9 with eight to 16 years of service. Because they are more technically centered than LDOs, CWOs are only selected from E-7s and above with 12 to 22 years of service. Selection boards for both LDO and CWOs are held in January.

"I think most people, when first hearing of this review, thought that it was all doom and gloom," said Jones. "But the reality is that it's a necessary evolution that will leave us stronger.

"A big problem we had in the past is that we select the numbers we need by designator to keep a balanced entry into each technical field," said Jones. "Later on, we promote with everyone in one large pot and some designators with less sea duty are disadvantaged. We are evaluating a move toward promotion by designator to ensure we get the right balance at the senior level as well – this fits in well with the initiative to keep the communities viable and sustainable.

"The future is bright for the LDO/CWO community," said Jones. "This very necessary review, the largest since our collective inception in 1948, is long overdue. Most encouraging is the consistent overwhelming support from senior Navy leadership who highly value this community of seasoned technical leadership."

For more information visit the Navy Personnel Command LDO/CWO Community page at http://www.npc.navy.mil/Officer/CommunityManagers/LDOCWOOCM/.

A Sailors work is never done

BM3 Will Crawford does preventative maintenance to a life jacket aboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) Jan. 6.

U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Mikey Mulcare