Fleet Activities, Yokosuka, Japan

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JMSDF invites FISC Yokosuka to annual *mochi*-pounding event

By H. Sam Samuelson, FISC Yokosuka Office of Corporate Communication

A select group of military enlisted, officers and leadership from Fleet and Industrial Supply Center Yokosuka (FISC), Japan, joined Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) logisticians in an annual end-of-year *mochi*-pounding festival at the JMSDF Ship Supply Depot (SSD) in nearby Taura.

The festival provided U.S. Navy guests an opportunity to participate in the festival, an important Japanese cultural event that heralds the coming of the New Year.

The *mochi*-pounding ceremony, or *mochisuki*, is usually an all-day community event in which *mochi* – a glutinous rice mixture called m*ochigome* – is kneaded and pounded until it becomes smooth and shiny and takes on a consistency somewhat like soft taffy.

The event is usually held in neighborhood parks, town squares or other social gathering locations throughout Japan, sometime around Christmas or New Years Day.

The rice meal is prepared the day before with a thorough washing and left overnight to soak. The day of the festival, the steamed rice is poured into a rice mortar or *usu*, where – during the festival – one participant alternately pounds the *mochi* with a special mallet called a *kine* while another leans in to knead the *mochi* with the hands. The sequence demands precision as the kneading is done swiftly between mallet strikes on the wetted bed of rice.

Participants don light robes called *happi* coats and head bands and – upon striking the bed of rice – cry: "*yoissho*," which, when translated means "hurray!"

Two large *usu* were standing by in the JMSDF SSD warehouse, which was dressed out for the holiday festivities. JMSDF staff were busily initiating the pounding and kneading of the *mochigome*, and then turned to invite selected FISC Yokosuka guests.

"First, of course, our hosts demonstrated the *mochi*-pounding sequence and then they invited us forward," said FISC Executive Officer Cmdr. Ed Butzirus. "I remember thinking two things: those big mallets look heavy, and, I hope I don't screw up and hit someone's hand (only the Japanese performed the kneading of the *mochigome* between mallet strikes).

"Well, the mallets weren't as heavy as I thought," Butzirus continued, "and we picked up the rhythm pretty quickly and safely. No broken fingers.

"But I will say – this was another great experience participating in our host country's culture. Our Japanese hosts are so inviting and accepting, we are always honored to join them in cultural events such as these because they go a long way toward helping us maintain our friendly partnerships," Butzirus added.

FISC Commanding Officer Capt. Matt Feely thanked his counterpart, SSD Commanding Officer Capt. Ryosuke Goryoda for the invitation.

"We were so proud to join them in this time-honored ceremony," Feely said. "I always look forward to our professional liaisons with our JMSDF counterparts, but – really – it is participation in the cultural and social events that we truly learn the Japanese culture and, for that, I remain profoundly thankful."

The festivities included cultural dances and, finally, an opportunity to enjoy some of the *mochi*-based fare, including sweet *mochi* cakes and hot *mochi* soup (*ozoni*), whose steam rose above the guests as they mingled and socialized in the open warehouse.

(Right) FISC Yokosuka Commanding Officer Capt. Matt Feely strikes a bed of wetted rice or *mochigome* with a mallet during the JMSDF-hosted New Year celebration mochi-pounding ceremony at the JMSDF Ship Supply Deport in nearby Taura.

Photo by Lt. j.g. Yoshifumi Kinoshita

USS Mustin reconfirms sister ship relationship with JMSDF ship *Ikazuchi* during ceremony

By Ensign David Elsenbeck, *USS Mustin* Public Affairs

The guided-missile destroyer *USS Mustin* (DDG 89) reconfirmed its sister ship relationship with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) ship *JS Ikazuchi* (DD 107) during a formal ceremony Dec. 22 in Yokosuka, Japan.

On hand for the ceremony was *Mustin* Commanding Officer Cmdr. Michael V. Misiewicz, along with several members of the *Mustin* crew and *Ikazuchi* Commanding Officer Cmdr. Tokihiko Umezaki and several Japanese sailors.

The ceremony commenced as the distinguished visitors from *Ikazuchi* arrived, bringing with them two *Kadomatsu* trees.

Kadomatsu trees are traditional Japanese decorations for the New Year to honor ancestral spirits or *kami* of the harvest. The trees were hand made by several sailors from *Ikazuchi* and were proudly displayed on the quarterdeck of *Mustin*. Sailors from *Mustin* assisted with the proper placement of the trees, after which, a brief *Kadomatsu* ceremony was conducted. Guests were then escorted to the wardroom for presentation of sister ship certificates and holiday-themed refreshments.

"I am greatly pleased today to be able to participate in the traditional *Kadomatsu* ceremony and reconfirm the bond between *USS Mustin* and *JS Ikazuchi* as sister ships," said Misiewicz. "As we enter this joyous time of year let this ritual remind us of the very strong friendship between our two crews, our navies, our nations and our families who continue to sacrifice along with us daily to preserve peace and stability in the Pacific region."

The ceremony was a way to not only celebrate the holiday season and the end of the year, but also a great culminating event for the two ships to re-commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Cooperation between the U.S. Navy and the JMSDF.

(Left) *USS Mustin* (DDG 89) Commanding Officer Cmdr. Michael Misiewicz welcomes Cmdr. Tokihiko Umezaki, commanding officer of the JMSDF ship *Ikazuchi* as he arrives on board *Mustin* to take part in the sister ship reconfirmation ceremony.

U.S. Navy photo by OS3 Chin Ng

INSIDE

Blue Ridge hosts Sailors, families for holiday dinner

***USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) and embarked 7th Fleet staff Sailors shared the holiday with shipmates and family during a special dinner in the crew's galley Dec. 25.**

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Military Working Dog retires with honors, finds new home

A nine-year veteran of protecting U.S. Navy personnel and property, Military Working Dog Bak retired from active duty service during a ceremony with full honors here Dec. 16.

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