# Change of command highlights Asian/Pacific Heritage Month

**Story and photos by MCSN Charles Oki, Navy Public Affairs Support Element Japan**

In 1975, as a young boy, Cmdr. H.B. Le and his family fled South Vietnam during the fall of Saigon, following the end of the Vietnam War. Almost three-and-one-half decades later; he assumed command of the forward-deployed Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer *USS Lassen* (DDG 82).

Le, a Vietnamese-American, took command of *Lassen* April 23, a week before the start of Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month, which celebrates diversity within the United States. As part of that celebration, the Navy honors its many service members of Asian and Pacific Island descent.

According to Navy Personnel Command, the Navy harvests and represents the strength of the nation's diversity.

For Le, the diverse backgrounds of the Sailors in the Navy are directly influenced by the ethnic diversity that is found in the United States.

"I'm truly proud to be in the Navy and I think diversity makes the Navy stronger," said Le. "I'm glad to be able to work alongside professionals in the Navy, regardless of where they are from; their race, ethnic origin, background or religious affiliation. "They're fine examples of what Americans are and can be."

According to the Center for Immigration Studies, approximately one million immigrants successfully applied for citizenship in the U.S. in 2007.

**Cmdr. H.B. Le reads his orders before taking command of the guided-missile destroyer *USS Lassen* (DDG 82) April 23. Le relieved Cmdr. Anthony Simmons during a change of command ceremony held at CFAY. *Lassen* is assigned to Destroyer Squadron 15 and is a part of the 7th Fleet's forward-deployed naval forces in Yokosuka, Japan.**

Le feels that the diverse background of the United States is a great opportunity to find dedicated professionals to help the Navy grow as an organization.

"In order for the Navy to be strong, it needs to recruit from the best in America regardless of background," said Le. "We still need to be able to tap into those people because there is some hidden talent there."

Le was born in Hue, Vietnam and arrived onto U.S. sovereign territory when he and members of his family stepped aboard *USS Barbour County* (LST 1195) May 2, 1975 during the fall of South Vietnam. The Le family officially immigrated to the U.S. in June 1975. He became a U.S. citizen April 30, 1985, exactly 10 years after the fall of Saigon.

**Cmdr. Anthony Simmons is rung ashore after turning over command of the Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer *USS Lassen* (DDG 82) to Cmdr. H.B. Le during a change of command ceremony April 23.**

Le's father was a commander in the Republic of Vietnam navy before and during the Vietnam War, which helped influence Le's decision to pursue a commission in the Navy of his new country.

"My father, he's my hero," said Le. "He was a South Vietnamese navy commander and his career was cut short because of the war, so I wanted to follow in his footsteps as an officer."

Le received his commission after graduating with merit from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1992, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in economics.

Le said his sense of patriotism to the country that welcomed him and his family also influenced his decision to join the Navy.

"I wanted to give back to the United States and give service to my country," he said. "We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the United States."

Le feels that his success, especially this milestone in his career, can be attributed to his family and fellow Sailors who have led him along the way.

"Certainly I've got my family to thank for their love and support," said Le. "Also, I've got to thank all the leaders and Sailors with whom I've worked through my 17 years, without them I wouldn't be here."

Cmdr. Le has served on *USS Ticonderoga* (CG 47), *USS Wasp* (LHD 1), *USS Hue City* (CG 66) and *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54). He also spent time with Requirements, Policy, and Experimentation (N8/9) directorate at U.S. 2nd Fleet and the Joint Training (J-7) directorate at U.S. Joint Forces Command.

He also earned a Master of Science degree in Operations Research (with distinction) from the Naval Postgraduate School and a Master of Business Administration degree (summa cum laude) from Touro University International. He is also a graduate of the Naval War College Nonresident Seminar Program and the Joint Forces Staff College.

# 7th Fleet to conduct Exercise Malabar 09

**By U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs**

Ships, aircraft and submarines from the U.S., Japan and India will take part in Exercise Malabar 09 off the coast of Okinawa, Japan, April 26 to May 3.

The Malabar exercise series has historically been a bilateral exercise between the U.S. and Indian navies. This year the Indian Navy also invited the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force to participate.

Exercise Malabar 09 is designed to increase interoperability among the Indian, Japanese and U.S. maritime forces to develop common understanding and procedures for maritime operations.

"We look forward to this opportunity to work with the very professional maritime forces of India and Japan," said Commander U.S. 7th Fleet Vice Adm. John Bird. "Malabar gives us the chance to build greater interoperability with two of our most important regional partners."

The at-sea training will include anti-submarine warfare and surface warfare maneuvers; gunnery training; air defense; and visit, board, search and seizure. The participants will also conduct personnel exchanges and professional discussions at sea and ashore.

The U.S. will be represented by 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), guided missile destroyers *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) and *USS Chafee* (DDG 90) and fast-attack submarine *USS Seawolf* (SSN 21), along with various P-3C and SH-60 aircraft.