Americans, Australians commemorate Battle of Coral Sea

Story and photo by Lt. Cmdr. Denver Applehans, Commander Amphibious Force, 7th Fleet Public Affairs

Americans and Australians commemorated the World War II Battle of Coral Sea in Surfer's Paradise, Australia May 1.

The event marked the 68th anniversary of the battle which occurred May 4-8, 1942 and is known by many in Australia as the battle that saved Australia. An allied naval task group composed of U.S. and Australian ships fought an Imperial Japanese Fleet that was pressing to invade Port Moresby in New Guinea.

The battle was the first naval battle in which the fleets did not come within naval gun range but instead fought the entire battle with aircraft launched from their respective aircraft carriers.

The battle itself ended in a stalemate, but stopped the Japanese advance, kept the supply and communication lines between the U.S. and Australia open and led to a strategic victory for the allies by reducing the number of imperial aircraft carriers and aircraft available for the Japanese invasion of Midway Island.

The ceremony in Surfer's Paradise honored those lost in the battle as well as the close relationship between the United States and Australia that was forged in part from this battle.

Speakers included Chris Corkey of the U.S. Consulate in Sydney, Brett Raguse, a member of the Australian Parliament, Commander Amphibious Forces U.S. 7th Fleet Rear Adm. Richard Landolt and veterans of the Battle of Coral Sea.

"Let us today, remember the heroes of the Battle of Coral Sea, let us celebrate our enduring friendship and continue our mutual commitment to supporting peace and stability in the region and around the globe," said Landolt.

The ceremony ended with the laying of 24 wreaths on the monument from various Australian and American groups in honor of those who died at that pivotal battle. Many of the wreaths included sashes that echoed the words written on the monument, "Lest we forget."

Commander Amphibious Force 7th Fleet Rear Adm. Richard Landolt, speaks with Australian navy Cadet Jeremy Orr after the Battle of Coral Sea commemoration ceremony in Surfer's Paradise, Australia May 1. The battle was a turning point in World War II, which stopped the advance of the Japanese Imperial Navy and kept the lines of supply and communication open between the United States and Australia.

Many of the veterans and their family members who attended the ceremony commented that holding ceremonies such as this one help to remind both Americans and Australians of the sacrifices made and the cost of freedom.

Seaman to Admiral program application submission deadline July 1

By Naval Service Training Command Public Affairs

The Seaman to Admiral (STA-21) commissioning program, which provides a passageway for qualified Sailors to receive a college education and a commission, is soliciting applications for fiscal year 2011. The deadline for submitting application packages is July 1.

The STA-21 program is one of the best officer commissioning programs the Navy has to offer, according to Dr. C. Jill Stein, Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps program director at Naval Service Training Command's Officer Development directorate in Pensacola, Fla.

"STA-21 pays up to $10,000 per year for college costs such as tuition, books and fees," said Stein. "All the while, Sailors draw their full pay and allowances for their current pay grade. Under the STA-21 program, Sailors have 36 months, including summer semesters, to complete their Bachelors degree requirements."

There are several options within the STA-21 program toward which prospective candidates can pursue, including Pilot, Naval Flight Officer, Surface Warfare Officer, Special Warfare, Special Operations, Human Resources Officer, Civil Engineer Corps, Nurse Corps and Medical Corps endeavors.

The STA-21 program benefits Sailors as well as the Navy. The average candidate has at least two years and in most cases more than four years, of observed performance which assists in the process of selecting the most qualified Sailors to receive a commission.

Additionally, STA-21 candidates are on average older than most midshipmen, bringing a maturity directly reflected in the more than 90 percent completion rate STA-21 program candidates boast.

Additionally, because many Sailors involved in the STA-21 program already have some college credit, not all candidates need the three years allotted to earn a degree.

All of these factors - proven performance for better selection, maturity for higher completion rates, and some college credit to help shorten the time in the program - save the Navy money while producing top-quality experienced naval officers.

Commanding officers and other reporting seniors thinking they have a Sailor with the potential to be selected as an officer or candidate for any other special program should comment in the candidate's performance evaluations on their leadership and potential early in their career, even if the numeric grade and promotion recommendations time on board, time in grade and peer ranking are not fully consistent with the comments.

Before assigning Sailors to an interview board, commanding officers and executive officers should conduct training with the candidate on how to be board members and how to participate in a board. The best Sailors should be ranked high and comments and grades should match.

If a Sailor is the number one candidate within a command, the Officer Interview Board or the Nomination Review Board grades and remarks should match a Sailor's outstanding ranking and the comments. Lack of consistency must be reconciled by the selection board, which makes it more difficult to evaluate a Sailor's true potential. Additionally, Sailors should undergo a mock board for practice before going to an official board.

Career counselors, officer program coordinators, commanding officers and executive officers should assist applicants by taking time to closely scrutinize packages for correctness and to determine if the applicant really meets the requirements of the applied for program.

Every year, approximately one-third of STA-21 program applications are determined to be "not-qualified" for one reason or another - the top three reasons being: no SAT/ACT scores; the applicant did not qualify for the STA-21 program or the program-option applied for, or the application lacked a mandatory document.

After careful scrutiny, if either the command or the applicant is still unsure if the program requirements are met or not, they can contact the STA-21 program office by email at: PNSC_STA21@navy.mil or they can call (850) 452-9563, DSN: 922-9563. Office staff can answer all questions and explain if a specific requirement can be waived.

The STA-21 program requires a minimum score of 500 critical reading and 500 math, or an ACT score of 20 English and 21 math for eligibility. The exception to this is the nuclear option, where the minimums are a composite Scholastic Aptitude Test score of 1,140 or a composite ACT score of 30. The score for any test taken within three years of application is acceptable.

Because of the delay between testing and score release, it is strongly recommended Sailors take the requisite tests early. By doing so, Sailors will determine if they meet the minimum requirements before investing their time in putting a package together.

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