# Sailors honor fallen service members, clean up Yokohama Foreigner Cemetery

**Story and photo by MC3 Devon Dow,**
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Sailors from various Yokosuka-based commands took part in an annual cleanup project at the Yokohama Foreign General Cemetery on May 26, honoring the final resting place for U.S. Sailors and Marines who have died in Japan.

Sailors raked leaves, pulled weeds, pruned bushes and trees, power-washed grave markings, and cleared pathways giving way to the scenic view overlooking the Yokohama skyline.

"Many of these fallen heroes have no family in the area to take care of their final resting place, which is where we come in. It only makes sense," said Lt. Cmdr. Romadel De Las Alas, officer-in-charge of Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka's Negishi Detachment in Yokohama.

The Japanese government-owned cemetery grounds, which covers more than 20,000 square meters and contains some 4,200 graves, has been in use by the foreign community of this area since 1854 when a Sailor from one of the ships under the command of Commodore William Perry was buried on the hill overlooking Yokohama.

De La Alas said the volunteer work is an honorable act and that his expectations were exceeded by the work of his fellow volunteers at the cemetery.

"The volunteers we have here are a combination of staff members, Sailors and family members. It's something we are not getting paid for, only to show our appreciation," he said. "The Japanese do a great job with maintenance in this facility, however to make it look nice the way we are doing, builds a sense a pride - that is why volunteers come out."

**After cleaning away leaves, MA2 James Stinyard places an American flag back on the grave of a Sailor from *USS Oneida*, a 19th century U.S. vessel that was struck by another ship and sank in Yokohama Bay in 1870. Sailors from various commands at CFAY volunteered at the Yokohama Foreign General Cemetery May 26, to pull weeds, rake up debris, power-wash grave markers and prune the grave-sites of hundreds of foreigners who served during the two world wars and died in Japan.**

One volunteer in particular was not only enjoying himself, but wanting to make sure that he used every minute he was there making an improvement. Master-at-Arms Second Class (SW) James Stinyard, of Little Rock, Ark., while wielding both a weed-eater in one hand and a leaf blower in the other said the cleanup project was a unique experience.

"For my first time coming out here, I think it went great," Stinyard said. "No matter what country we are in, it always looks good for us as Sailors to pay our respects to those who paved the way for us to be here and to perform acts of community service. Being afforded the opportunity to tidy up these memorials is very humbling."

Another Sailor who participated in the cleanup effort spoke about the importance of doing community service in Japan.

"Giving back to the community always feels good. Here in Japan, when I go out with groups to volunteer, I always see and experience something new," said Gunner's Mate 2nd Class (SW) Ivan Wilson of Hopkinsville, Ky. "When I heard about the cemetery I wondered where it would be, because space is limited in Japan and the location is incredible. It was a good day all around."

This year marks the 50th anniversary of U.S. and Japan alliance. De Las Alas said that he is optimistic about the future of that union.

"I think our bond is one that will last hopefully for an eternity," he said. "The Japanese see the benefits of their relationship with the U.S., not only in an economic, but a security sense as well. They are more than willing to learn what we do as much as we are willing to learn from them. The fact that the Japanese have a cemetery dedicated to foreigners, speaks volumes to who they are as a people and as a country."

# *USS Fitzgerald* undergoes change of command

**By ENS William M. Morrison,**
***USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) Public Affairs**

With the ships Officers, Chiefs and Sailors on the stage, the crew of guided missile destroyer *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) conducted a Change of Command ceremony on May 18 at the Yokosuka Fleet Theater.

During the ceremony Cmdr. Dennis Velez relieved Cmdr. Richard Dromerhauser as commanding officer of *Fitzgerald*.

"To command is to serve — nothing more and nothing less," said Dromerhauser as he addressed the Sailors. "I have been inspired by your sacrifice, strengthened by your skill, and humbled by your dedication and service. The incredible success of this ship is your doing."

During Dromerhauser's tour, *Fitzgerald* participated in seven multinational exercises and two international fleet reviews.

*Fitzgerald* was, also, selected to represent the 7th Fleet during the 60th Anniversary of the People's Liberation Army Navy in Qingdao, China, where the ship hosted both U.S. and Chinese Chiefs of Naval Operations and numerous government and military dignitaries from 22 nations.

In addition to three consecutive Battle Efficiency Awards, the ship received consecutive Unit Tactics, Anti-Submarine Warfare Bloodhound, and Retention Excellence awards in 2008 and 2009. The missile defense, anti submarine warfare, special mission, and international engagement ship of choice, his command excelled during all of these missions.

For Dromerhauser, a native of New York, this was his second command of a Navy ship. He served as the commanding officer of *USS Tempest* as a lieutenant. During tours on six ships, he participated in numerous Carrier and Expeditionary Strike Group deployments to Western Africa, the Mediterranean Sea, Adriatic Sea, Red Sea, Indian Ocean, Western Pacific, and Arabian Gulf.

An Operations Research sub-specialist with Systems Analysis sub-specialty experience, Dromerhauser graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and Naval Postgraduate School with degrees in Engineering, Operations Research, and Systems Analysis. He is a Joint Qualified Officer, having graduated from both the Armed Forces Staff College and Air Command and Staff College.

Additionally, Dromerhauser completed shore tours with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Navy Personnel Command. Dromerhauser assumed command of USS *Fitzgerald* on Oct. 31, 2008. He will return to the Navy Personnel Command for his next assignment.

**Cmdr. Dennis Velez delivers remarks after assuming command of the guided-missile destroyer *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) from Cmdr. Richard Dromerhauser in a change of command ceremony held at Fleet Activities Yokosuka's Fleet Theater.**
**Photo by MC3 Devon Dow**

Velez will become the ship's tenth commanding officer. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1992 with a Bachelor's Degree in Aerospace Engineering. He later earned a Master's Degree in Information Technology Management.

Velez's previous sea tours include *USS Stout* (DDG 55), *USS Carr* (FFG 52), *USS Gettysburg* (CG 64), *USS Mount Whitney* (LCC 20), and *USS Donald Cook* (DDG 75). His shore assignments include Officer In Charge of Western Hemisphere Group Caribbean Area Coordinator in Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, where he provided logistical support to all naval forces operating in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Velez also served as Surface Placement Branch Head and Deputy Director for Surface Warfare Distribution for the Naval Personnel Command.