USS Blue Ridge earns 10th consecutive "Green H" Unit Award

Story and photo by MC3 Melvin F. Orr III,
***USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs**

The 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) painted two green stars onto its bridge wing to distinguish itself as a ten-time consecutive winner of the Force Health and Wellness Unit Award.

The Force Health and Wellness Unit Award, or "Green H," is presented to commands selected by Commander, Naval Surface Forces in recognition of the ship's commitment to the health and welfare of its Sailors and Marines.

"Training is a major part of our commitment to the crew's well being," said Senior Chief Hospital Corpsman Connie J. Lawson, *Blue Ridge* Medical Department head. "We have a health and wellness committee that focuses on the necessary issues to help our crew."

The committee includes the chief medical officer, chaplain, safety officer, morale, welfare and recreation officer, and drug and alcohol program advisor.

"Crew training is focused on topics of hearing preservation, sexual responsibility, pregnancy prevention, avoiding sexually transmitted diseases and suicide awareness, which better serves the crew and helps them stay focused on their jobs," Lawson said.

The *Blue Ridge* Medical Department sets three goals for itself each year with the purpose of improving the health of the crew. In 2009, the department's goals were increasing sexual responsibility by decreasing sexually transmitted diseases by 75 percent, reduce injuries and develop and enhance stress management.

While these goals have only a small impact on the overall score towards the "Green H" Award, Lawson believes these goals are important for the welfare of the crew.

Automatic disqualification from the award occurs if medical and dental requirements or periodic physical fitness assessments are not within certain standards.

The medical staff serves a crew of 1,300 Sailors and Marines and is facilitated with an X-Ray room, two examination rooms, pharmacy, patient ward, small operating room for basic surgery, and a fully equipped dental clinic.

Blue Ridge is commanded by Capt. Rudy Lupton and serves under Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) 7/Task Force (CTF) 76, the Navy's only forward-deployed amphibious force. *Blue Ridge* is the flagship for Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet. Task Force 76 is headquartered at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa Japan with an operations detachment in Sasebo, Japan.

QM3 Clinton Wagner paints two green stars on the bridge wing of the 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) July 16. The two stars distinguish *Blue Ridge* as a ten-time consecutive winner of the Force Health and Wellness "Green H" Unit Award, which recognizes the ship's commitment to the health and welfare of its Sailors and Marines.

"Diamondbacks" change command over *George Washington*

By MC3 David Cox,
***USS George Washington* Public Affairs**

Cmdr. Steven Hejmanowski from the "Diamondbacks" of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 102, relieved Cmdr. David Little, during a change of command ceremony above *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) July 11.

Little, a Glens Falls, New York native, said he was sad to be leaving the squadron, but will be transferring to Peterson Air Force Base and is hopeful for the future.

"Success is based on professionalism and you guys have shown me a level of professionalism that I am thoroughly proud of. To watch the continued success of the Diamondbacks and to watch you guys grow, it has truly been an honor to serve with you," Little said. "Keep pushing, keep moving forward, it isn't easy being the best, but you guys show them day in and day out that it takes hard work to make it happen."

During the ceremony, Little and Hejmanowski performed a flyby over the *George Washington* symbolizing the changeover. Little broke away from the formation with flares engaged and Hejmanowski landed shortly after as the new commanding officer of VFA 102.

When Little arrived on the flight deck he was welcomed with a celebratory wash-down from his fellow shipmates, an aviation tradition when leaving a squadron.

The ceremony was attended by Rear Adm. Dan Cloyd from Carrier Strike Group Five/Task Force 70 (CTF 70), *USS George Washington* Commanding Officer Capt. David Lausman and Capt. Ross Myers from Carrier Air Wing 5.

Myers, a guest speaker at the event, spoke thoughtfully of Little and was enthusiastic about the new change.

"One thing about this change of command, it is swift, it is sweet and it is certain, you all saw his leadership day in and day out," Myers said. "You've all seen where the Diamondbacks have come from, where they are today, and where they're going tomorrow. The trajectory the Diamondbacks built started with Skipper Little and will now continue with the loyalty of Skipper Hejmanowski."

Myers said that Little, who took command of VFA 102 in January 2008, instilled a culture of excellence in his shipmates. During Little's command, the squadron achieved 5,445 mishap free flight hours in 3,144 sorties.

Hejmanowski, who has been with the Diamondbacks for 15 months previously serving as the executive officer, was thrilled to continue serving with the team.

"I have a phenomenal team right now, from my executive officer, to a world class command master chief, to the whole crew," said Hejmanowski. "I have the greatest motivated group of Sailors and we will continue to excel."

(Right) Cmdr. David P. Little from the VFA 102 "Diamondbacks" chats with CTF 70 Rear Adm. Dan Cloyd , after a cake-cutting ceremony to honor the squadron's change of command aboard *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) July 11.
U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Danielle A. Brandt

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His constant communication with the Japanese rescue team led to the end of his and Kuhns ordeal around 10 p.m. that night.

Kuhns, now reunited with his son, was sent to the hospital and treated for dehydration and exposure. Furman, who was graciously thanked for his efforts by the entire rescue team and Japanese police on site, was escorted to the police station to fill out some paperwork.

"When I went to the police station to fill out the report, the police chief asked for my work number," he said. "At this point, it is 2 a.m. I was thinking 'OK, like him; he must think that my boss is awake.'"

In a show of cultural respect and appreciation, the police chief called Furman's commanding officer to thank him personally for Furman's assistance.

While overseas, U.S. service members serve as ambassadors who are held to an exceptional standard when stationed in host countries and visiting ports-of-call. Furman said his efforts to help Kuhns would not have been possible without the work between himself and the Japanese law enforcement.

Furman's climb to the top of Mount Fuji and rescue of a fellow shipmate and World War II veteran is an adventure, Furman said he will long remember.

"Mr. Kuhn's is an amazing man I'll never forget," Furman said about climbing Fuji at 84, "I'd be darned if he didn't do what he said he would and climb the mountain again at 84 years old. Now that is impressive."