Navy IA Sailor support continues to expand

By MC1 Russell Tafuri, NAVCENT Public Affairs

To ensure that Sailors receive the support they need while deployed as an IA, the Navy implemented a command, complete with Sailor services, to support the journey from their parent command to their deployed unit and back again.

Commander Task Force Individual Augmentee (CTF-IA), was established by NAVCENT in November 2008 to support Navy IA Sailors deployed throughout the AOR, providing a locally based, forward-deployed command and staff that Sailors can turn to for help. The command also offers Navy-specific support that is necessary in a joint service combat environment.

"Our task force is charged with ensuring that every Sailor receives the oversight, guidance and support they need while deployed as an IA," said Commander Task Force Individual Augmentee Rear Adm. T.C. Cropper. "Our Sailors do amazing work while deployed as individual augmentees and it is important that they have a Navy chain of command to help them while they serve in joint, expeditionary combat billets."

The IA Sailors' chain of command within the NAVCENT AOR starts in Bahrain with the CTF-IA command staff and extends to three forward headquarters in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan. CTF-IA has also implemented a mobile support team to travel throughout the AOR to assist Sailors with pay, career, medical, spiritual and other needs.

"What this means for spouses and families at home is their deployed Sailors' needs are met, and the necessary support structure is in place from before the deployment begins all the way through to their transition back home," said CTF-IA Chief of Staff Capt. Rinda Ranch-Hillis. "We are here and will be here to support Sailors completely during their IA deployment."

In addition to CTF-IA support while deployed to the region, Navy parent commands in the continental United States (CONUS) have a designated command individual augmentee coordinator (CIAC), similar to a Navy command ombudsman, who maintains liaison between IA Sailors, their command and the families of deployed Sailors.

The CIAC maintains that critical lifeline between the Sailors and his or her parent command and ensures things run smoothly for the deployed Sailors' families.

As each IA Sailor deployment comes to an end, they attend a three-day Warrior Transition Program (WTP) in Kuwait designed to expedite gear return, allow for down-time and provide them with transition guidance before returning home to their family and friends.

Once home, IA Sailors are encouraged to attend a Returning Warrior Workshop (RWW) during which they and a family member participate in an expenses paid conference near their home or Navy operational support center. Most, if not all, expenses related to the RWW are covered by the IA Sailor's parent command.

Visit www.ia.navy.mil and www.cusnc.navy.mil/ctf-ia/ctf-ia.htm for more IA deployment information.

Blue Ridge, 7th Fleet Sailors COMREL improves Tokyo International School

Story and photo by MC3 Daniel Viramontes, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) and embarked 7th Fleet staff Sailors volunteered to help improve a school in Tokyo during a community relations (COMREL) project Aug. 4.

IT2 Adam Kraus and Meguna, a student at the Tokyo YMCA International School (TYIS), paint a classroom together during a community relations project Aug. 4. Sailors worked alongside the TYIS staff and students in painting the school's library, classrooms, computer rooms and hallways.

The Tokyo YMCA International School (TYIS) offers North American-style classes from kindergarten to sixth grade for students and teachers from many cultures, guided by the principles of the YMCA.

Sailors worked alongside TYIS staff and students in painting the school's library, classrooms, computer rooms and hallways of the school.

"The school needed some painting really bad," said Kevin Maxfield, program director for the school. *Blue Ridge* worked with YMCA last year, and Maxfield said he knew he could count on the ship's help again.

"I now know if we ever need help from the *Blue Ridge*, we can get it." said Maxfield. "It strengthens the bond with the Navy, the community, and the friendships between countries."

Information Systems Technician 3rd Class Elizabeth Gordon, a Sailor attached to *Blue Ridge*, was one of 38 Sailors who traveled from Yokosuka to Tokyo to volunteer in the project.

"Interacting with the children and teaching them how to paint was lots of fun," Gordon said. "Growing up, I was always working with kids at the YMCA."

Blue Ridge is commanded by Capt. Thom W. Burke and serves under Commander Expeditionary Strike Group 7/Task Force 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 operating detachment in Sasebo, Japan.

Lassen makes a difference from a distance

By Lt. j.g. Douglas Gates, *USS Lassen* Public Affairs

Sailors aboard the guided-missile destroyer *USS Lassen* (DDG 82) are making a difference in Dili, Timor Leste from their homeport of Yokosuka, Japan.

After the ship made a humanitarian port visit to the city in January 2009, *Lassen* crewmembers still maintain a close relationship with Caritas Dili, a local charity that distributes donated goods to those in need. *Lassen* Sailors donated school supplies, sporting goods and clothes to Caritas during the January port visit and sent a second donation in March.

Lassen Sailor Ship's Serviceman 1st Class (SW) Constancio Argarin, from Manila, Republic of the Philippines, led the charity drive by collecting clothing and toys from his fellow Sailors and arranging for their distribution to Caritas. "I'm just glad to be able to help people in need," Argarin said. "We're still close to the people in Dili and happy to do anything we can for them."

Lassen Command Master Chief (SW/AW) Leon Walker, from Cleveland, Ohio, was pleased with the effort exhibited by *Lassen* Sailors.

"It's great to see that we've maintained our connection to the people of Timor Leste, even several months after we first met them," Walker said. "Petty Officer Argarin and his team are setting the example of honor and commitment."

"*Lassen's* continued efforts with Caritas are a prime example of Sailors acting with the utmost care and compassion long after the initial event," said Destroyer Squadron 15 Chaplain and Community Service Coordinator Lt. Cmdr. Barry Metzger. "The relationship between *Lassen* and Caritas is a prime example of the exemplary way U.S. 7th Fleet Sailors reach out during our visits to Western Pacific ports."

Lt. j.g. Kristina Rohlin, assigned to *USS Lassen* (DDG 82), checks the size of a shirt before giving it to a girl at the Missionary Dominican Sisters of the Rosary orphanage in Dili, Timor-Leste during a humanitarian port visit Jan. 26.

U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Charles Oki