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U.S. Fleet Activities, Yokosuka, Japan

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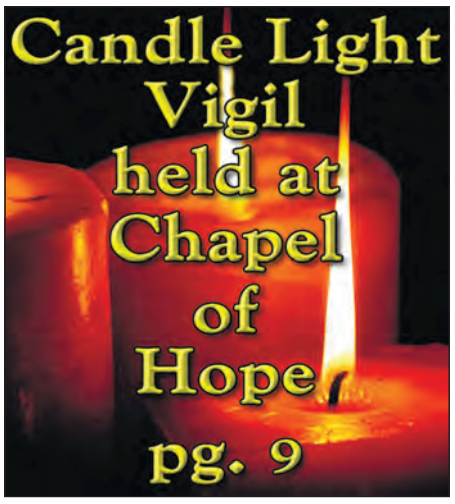


# Commodore Perry, crew visit Tokyo for *Jidai Matsuri* parade

**By Ben Avey, CFAY Public Affairs**

Sailors from Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) dressed in replica Navy uniforms from the mid 1800s marched through the streets of Tokyo as a part of the annual *Jidai Matsuri* (historical festival) parade Nov. 3.

The parade, which celebrates the history of Japan by having people dress in period clothing and act out historic scenes for spectators, is an annual tradition that coincides with Japan's national Culture Day.

Representing a critical time in Japan's history, 12 CFAY Sailors dressed as Commodore Matthew Perry and his crew who, during a visit in 1854, forged the first trade relationship between the United States and Japan and helped to open Japanese ports to the world.

**Sailors from CFAY including CMDCM Gregory Vidaurri, dressed as Commodore Matthew C. Perry and members of his crew, march through the streets of Tokyo during the *Jidai Matsuri* parade Nov. 3. The annual Japanese festival celebrates significant periods from Japanese history.**

**U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Gabriel S. Weber**

Today, Japan and the United States continue to enjoy a close relationship and Sailors from CFAY were happy to participate in the parade and help celebrate the relationship of the two countries.

"Our team's role here today is to strengthen the alliance between Japan and the United States," said CFAY Command Master Chief Gregory Vidaurri, who acted as Commodore Matthew C. Perry in the parade. "Throughout the year, Japan hosts various events and they ask for representation from the U.S. Navy to come and display the U.S. flag and show that we are part of the Japanese community. This is just one of the many opportunities to come out and represent the United States in a positive way."

Religious Program Specialist 3rd Class William Leffler marched in the parade in 2008 and was selected to carry the national ensign in this year's parade. For him, participating in the event helped him to have a better understanding of Japanese culture and the community in which he lives.

"I love it, you get to explore different cultures and meet different people," said Leffler. "I think it's really important to get involved in the community and meet different people. I think it's a good experience [to get out of the immediate vicinity] of the base and meet new people."

The parade included a large number of acts including samurai, acrobats, musician's, soldiers, farmers and families, all in elaborate costumes complete with authentic props. But, with all of the parade excitement, the role of the CFAY Sailors was not lost on the viewing public, according to Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Rear Adm. Ryuzo Sakata, who was in the parade dressed as the regional governor who first greeted Perry upon his arrival.

"That history is very famous, not only to adults, but also to children," said Sakata. "Because of Perry, Japan is open to the world."

# *USS Lassen* earns third consecutive golden anchor for retention

**Story and photo by MC2 Matthew R. White,**
**Navy Public Affairs Support Element Japan**

The forward-deployed destroyer *USS Lassen* (DDG 82) will keep her golden anchors after earning the Retention Excellence Award for the third quarter of 2009.

More than 10 percent of the *Lassen* crew – 33 Sailors, made the commitment to stay Navy during the quarter, marking the third consecutive quarter *Lassen* has earned the retention award.

"I think it speaks highly of the command climate here," said *Lassen* Command Master Chief Donald Davis. "The morale is very good and I think the reason behind that is because the *Lassen* leadership sets a tone and creates an environment that says we care about our Sailors and their families."

Davis said setting a positive tone for *Lassen* Sailors starts before they even arrive, with a healthy sponsorship program. Once aboard the ship, all newly reporting Sailors immediately take part in the command's indoctrination program, followed by a career development board (CDB).

"[A] CDB give us the opportunity to sit down with Sailors to talk to them about their career paths and give them proper information about how to chart out a career for themselves," Davis said.

"A lot of the members don't know about the opportunities that the Navy has to offer, so by continuously doing career development boards, we open their eyes to different avenues available to them," said Navy Counselor 1st Class Josue Chery.

**(Right) *USS Lassen* (DDG 82) Commanding Officer Cmdr. H. B. Le, instructs Ensign Maynard Malixi to steer the ship during an underway replenishment Nov. 6. A strong mentorship program contributed to *Lassen* earning its third consecutive Retention Excellence Award.**

For *Lassen*, caring about each Sailor's career doesn't stop with a CDB.

"We have a very strong mentorship program," said *Lassen* Commanding Officer Cmdr. H. B. Le. "Sailors are able to choose which mentors they want and so they interact well with their mentors."

"For a lot of the junior Sailors, this is their first tour and they look up to the first class petty officers for advice on what to do as far as reenlisting or how to go about getting orders somewhere else," Chery said. "That helps out a lot."

The leadership aboard *USS Lassen* makes it a point to care just as much for a Sailor's personal well being. "We put a lot of energy and synergy into helping Sailors perform their jobs to the best of their ability; we need to have that same energy and synergy when they might have problems or personal issues," Davis said. "They know that they're going to work hard on *Lassen*, but if they ever have any problems or family or personal issues, our chain of command is going to take care of it."

Part of that personal care is evident in the command ombudsman program, which keeps *Lassen* families up-to-date and linked with the command.

"I think we have one of the best ombudsmen in the forward-deployed naval forces," said Davis. "The ombudsman ensures the same level of caring for the family that we put into caring for our Sailors."

For Davis, retention comes down to one simple rule. "Be brilliant on the basics," he said. "It sets you up for success and makes your Sailors believe you really care about them."