USS John S. McCain makes historic first visit to Vietnam

Story and photo by MC1 Brock A. Taylor, Navy Public Affairs Support Element Japan

The guided-missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) arrived pier side in Da Nang, Vietnam Aug. 10.

John S. McCain, forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan, made the port call to commemorate the 15th Anniversary of the Normalization of Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Vietnam.

This is the first time *John S. McCain* has visited Vietnam.

"This is a historic event for *USS John S. McCain*," said Cmdr. Jeffrey Kim, *John S. McCain* commanding officer. "For this ship and her crew, to be able to make our first visit to Vietnam, especially during this landmark event is truly an honor."

John S. McCain Sailors will interact with their Vietnamese counterparts during shipboard damage control and search and rescue demonstrations, as well as exchanges in culinary arts.

Off the ship, U.S. and Vietnamese sailors will participate in friendly sporting events such as soccer and volleyball. Throughout the visit, *John S. McCain* Sailors will conduct community service projects at a local school and orphanage. The crew will also have an opportunity to learn about the country during liberty and hosted tours of Da Nang.

Master-at-Arms 1st Class (SW/EXW) Jonathon Baker, from Columbia, S.C., whose father served in the Vietnam War, said that while the visit offers an opportunity to experience a unique culture, it's also a chance for Sailors to play an important role in enhancing United States and Vietnam relations.

"I really do encourage everyone to get out and see the country and learn something about Vietnam," said Baker. "Many of these junior Sailors' parents and grandparents served in Vietnam. Now there are normalized relations between the U.S. and Vietnam. We should take full advantage of being a part of this historic process."

The Navy conducted two port visits to Vietnam in 2008. In 2009, *USS John C. Stennis* (CVN 74) hosted the first-ever fly out of visitors from Vietnam to a U.S. aircraft carrier, and the U.S. 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) and the guided missile destroyer *USS Lassen* (DDG 82), commanded by Cmdr. H.B. Le, a Vietnamese-American, visited in November 2009. The hospital ship *USNS Mercy* (T-AH 19) also visited Vietnam in May as part of a large-scale humanitarian assistance mission, Pacific Partnership 2010.

(Center) Cmdr. Jeffrey Kim, commanding officer of the guided-missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) speaks with Vietnamese reporters following the ship's arrival to Da Nang Aug. 10. *John S. McCain* is visiting Da Nang to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the normalization of relations between Vietnam and the United States, and to conduct the first-ever training exchange with the Vietnam People's navy.

John S. McCain is assigned to Destroyer Squadron 15 and patrols the 7th Fleet area of responsibility. Operating in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean, the U.S. 7th Fleet is the largest of the forward-deployed U.S. fleets, with approximately 50 ships, 120 aircraft and 20,000 Sailors and Marines assigned at any given time.

Enlisted warfare qualifications now mandatory for all Sailors

By MCC(SW/AW) Sonya Ansarov, Office of the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy

Initial enlisted warfare qualifications are now mandatory for all Sailors as announced in the release of Naval Administrative Message NAVADMIN 268-10.

The NAVADMIN announces the release of OPNAVINST 1414.8, Navy Enlisted Warfare Qualification Programs Instruction, which issues the basic overarching requirements for the qualification and designation of all enlisted warfare programs.

The arduous and often unforgiving environment we operate in as a Navy and Sailors dictates the need for all personnel to have a basic understanding and operating knowledge of the platform or command to which they are assigned.

Warfare programs are essential in ensuring our Sailors understand and are able to effectively engage a casualty, operate equipment or platforms safely and ensure backup as needed. Warfare qualifications are about ship, shipmate and self, and ensure the safety and safe operation of each command and platform on a daily basis.

"It's a standard every Sailor must achieve," said Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) Rick D. West. "The warfare device itself is a symbol that the Sailors who are wearing it have a basic level of knowledge to ensure they are capable of fighting the ship, saving a shipmate and ensuring the safety of themselves at all times. Having every Sailor at or working toward that level will only strengthen the war-fighting ability of that command and the Navy."

According to the NAVADMIN, qualification and, or re-qualification is mandatory for all enlisted Sailors assigned to designated warfare qualifying commands.

Type commanders (TYCOM) will establish specific qualification and re-qualifying timelines however, the maximum allowable time for initial qualification of all enlisted Sailors assigned to designated warfare qualifying commands will not exceed 30 months. Timelines for warfare qualifications are set by TYCOM instructions and each TYCOM will have oversight of their programs.

According to West, some of the biggest questions he hears from Sailors are:

• What happens if a Sailor doesn't qualify in time? West stated that failure to qualify in the specific warfare program within the prescribed time requirements shall immediately result in a special performance evaluation that removes promotion recommendation, but the promotion recommendation may be restored with a special performance evaluation when qualification is achieved.

• Will a Sailor be penalized if their command doesn't offer the opportunity for warfare qualification? According to West, Sailors without the opportunity to qualify in a warfare specialty will not be penalized. However, Sailors should look for follow-on opportunities to obtain a warfare device when able.

• Will having mandatory qualifications water down the existing programs? West stated, quite the contrary; by mandating warfare qualifications for all enlisted personnel, it will significantly "raise the bar" across the command regarding level of knowledge of the command and the systems our Sailors operate. It is incumbent on those that wear the warfare pin of the command to ensure the integrity and strength of the existing programs.

• How will Sailors stand-out amongst peers if everyone is required to have a warfare pin? West stated, Sailors stand out every day. Performance and the Sailor's overall command support should be the biggest factors to "break out" individuals.

"I often highlight efficient manning and future platforms such as LCS (littoral combat ship) as examples of the need to ensuring our Sailors have a good, basic understanding of the systems and fighting capabilities of the command to which they are assigned," said West.

(Left) MCPON Rick D. West gives BMSN Brett Kish his Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist pin at an awards ceremony aboard the *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) during his first visit to Japan as the Navy's senior enlisted Sailor July 2, 2009. The Navy announced enlisted warfare qualifications are now mandatory for all Sailors. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Jennifer Villalovos

The editor asks:

"Did you know, a heated indoor swimming pool was built in the White House in 1933 for Franklin D. Roosevelt's therapy as he was disabled by polio? During President Nixon's first term, this space in the West Wing was converted into the White House pressroom. The Ford administration installed an outdoor pool on the south lawn in 1975."